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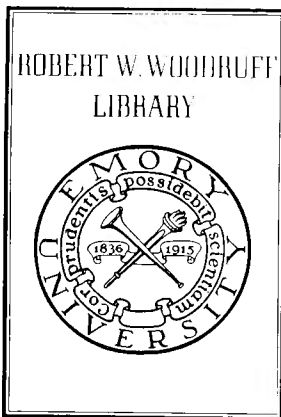
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# TOM CRACKENTHORPE;

OR,

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### ADVENTURES.

BY

### CHARLES CLARKE,

*Author of "Charlie Thornhill," "The Flying Scud," &c.*

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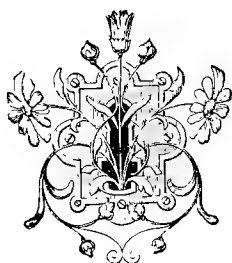
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# TOM CRACKENTHORPE;

OR,

HUNTING AND STEEPLECHASING ADVENTURES.

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## CHAPTER I.

TO LUSHENHAM.

It was a remarkably fine morning in the beginning of August, 18—, when a pair-horse fly drove into the quiet village of Lushenham, in —shire, exciting the attention of the few women and children who were idling or working at the cottage doors. The old springs rattled over the hard ruts, which were now dried by the summer sun, and which presented as substantial an obstacle to the wheels of a fly as the kerb-stone of a London street; for Lushenham stood upon clay, in the middle of England, and was famous only for the biggest fences, the widest brook, the largest grass field, and the sloshiest mud in the kingdom.

“Rachel, attend to your sampler,” said the village schoolmistress, as the unruly children got excited by the unwonted liveliness of the street; and, “Jack Hornby, if you looks arter your betters, instead of arter your letters, in that way, I’ll take it out o’ your back,” said old Scareham, the schoolmaster, as Master Hornby, imbibing a spirit of rhyme, if not of poetry, from the parish Dominie, had just exclaimed: “My hye, if there hain’t a fly!”—a use of the aspirates partly to be ascribed to the commotion of his feelings, and partly to the peculiarity of the —shire vernacular.

At the same instant there popped from out of the fly window the rosiest of gills, and the very largest regalia on record.

“Now then, stupid, where are you going? This can’t be the way to Boulter’s Farm, in the middle of the village!”

Up came the horses with a sudden jerk, worthy of a Piccadilly coachman, which shook off the cigar ash, and slightly damaged the protruding Lincoln and Bennett.

“Yes, this must be the way, sir. The man on the hill said

was close to the church—a large red brick building; and here is the church—and there's the farmhouse just beyond it."

The owner of the discomposed hat and regalia drew them in again: the flyman resumed his journey, and gave a rapid thought to an old proverb on the vicinity of the church, and its application to his two insides.

Jehu was not a first-class coachman, but, catching sight of the farmer's wife, or the tenant *in esse*, he determined upon presenting the tenants *in posse* in as distinguished a form as he could. He rounded the corner of the wall which led to the farm-yard gate, and which appeared to be the only or principal entrance to the domain, with two or three take-it-among-ye sort of cuts. The near horse, a little bit done, and pressed by his companion, who responded immediately to the application of the whip, gave rather a lurch than a bound, bringing the near wheel of the fly in contact with the gatepost. Causes have their effects even in Lushenham; and though this was simple, it was very decided: it landed the flyman on the top of his head, in a heap of manure, which saved him further trouble, and brought up Mr. Thomas Crackenthorpe and his friend Bobby Munster all standing, as the sailors have it, for it sent their heads straight into the opposite corners of the fly, and presented them with a sensation of fireworks about the nose and eyes which would have been invaluable to our one-eyed aunt, when her absence from Vauxhall used to be deplored in such melting terms. However, nothing was broken but the gatepost; the flyman was set upright again; the fly and horses stuck fast, and seemed glad to stick there; and the heroes of the little adventure were extricated by the buxom lady who was there to do the honours of the house.

It was not perhaps an auspicious manner of entering Lushenham for the first time, but Tom Crackenthorpe was one of those jovial good fellows that never trouble their heads about anything but the result. Being therefore on his legs, and the tingling sensation beginning to subside from his nose, he began at once to collect his ideas for the business he had on hand, and which had brought him and his friend Munster from the pleasant and lively little town of Pumpington, in the middle of the season. It was no other than this—an advertisement; and when advertisements deal in the marvellous to the extent that they do in the present day, we say that the result produced is not by any means adequate to the cause. Our surprise is, that the pleasure of seeing or purchasing Boulter's Farm, as an investment, had not brought two-thirds of the young men with available funds at once into collision for at least the investigation of such a property. It was described, in all the glowing colours of an auctioneer's pen, as "the most charming retreat from the fatigues of business or the haunts of

pleasure; situated in the midst of a fertile valley, alike fitted for the profitable employments of the dairy, and the more invigorating calling of the chase; within easy reach of two railways, and four packs of hunting dogs, whose fleetness and reputation are the admiration of the first sportsmen of England." The house was described as "large and commodious, calculated at once for the comforts of two or three single men, or for the more extensive arrangements of married life. Stabling for eight horses, various loose boxes, outhouses, and other conveniences to meet the requirements of the modern sportsman. The whole to be let or sold, with or without 160 acres of the finest pasture land in the world."

Such was the advertisement which met the eye of Tom Crackenthorpe, as he sat at breakfast at "The George," at Pumpington, tampering with an egg and a cup of tea, after what is commonly known as "a night." He had long wanted to give up Pumpington and its enervating pleasures. He had made up his mind that hunting, to be hunting, should be followed by one sound bottle of old port and a night's rest; and that it should be done from your own home in the middle of the shires. He began to be quite tired of the attentions of the M. C. of the Pumpington Rooms, of the eternal smiles and fading dresses of the young women, of the never-dying tea and turbans of the old. He began to tire of losing his small change to people who had always forgotten their purses, or had nothing less than a note in their pocket, when their turn came to pay; and, altogether, a couple of years at the Spa had shown him the advantages of independence in more matters than one, which could never be enjoyed in the thralldom of watering-place respectability. Tom had already looked at one or two places which he thought might suit him for a four months' residence in the winter, and give him at least an amphibious position between a landed proprietor and a gentleman from town; but he had not yet satisfied himself. One was too much of a place; another had not sufficient stabling; another looked like a citizen's villa at Brixton; and a fourth like a consumptive hospital, or a lunatic asylum with the bars down. In short, it did not seem so easy a matter to settle the whereabouts of a young man with about 1,000*l.* per annum, when he wanted most of the luxuries and all the conveniences of about 6,000*l.* a year. The present advertisement, however, struck him at once as the very thing: Boulter's Farm implied a purely agricultural situation; Lushenham was eminently distinguished as a hunting position, let alone the auctioneer's embellishment of the "hunting dogs;" and the proximity of two railways secured to him the opportunity of visiting the metropolis during a temporary frost. He had read the advertisement twice over, and had just decided that eggs and



toast were less appetizing than strong tea, when the coffee-room door opened and Bobby Munster made his appearance.

"Are you a man of your word, Bobby?"

"Did ye ever know an Irishman tell a lie?" replied Mr. Munster.

"Oh, you're not an Irishman; you only pretend to be, because the women are so fond of them. Do you feel inclined to leave this place, Bobby, and go into the country?"

"Not till after the 29th; I'm engaged to Clara Jones."

"Good heavens, man! what in the world have you been doing?" said Tom Crackenthorpe in evident alarm, and seeing his vision of mutual Lushenham comfort crumbling away; "don't you know that she hasn't a shilling; and that her miserable old mother is only trying to catch somebody? Besides, what in the name of fortune will you do with the hunting when you're married?"

"Married!" said Bobby; "I'm not going to be married."

"But you must be some day, if you are engaged, you know," said the other, who was honest enough to see as far down the well as that.

"I mean engaged for the first waltz at the Hospital Ball. Marry! Bedad, Crackenthorpe, I'd like to see the Governor's face when we came to the settlements! He wouldn't like the little place in Connemara upon parchment."

"Then you've no objection to give up Pumpington for the winter?"

"Not I; if not, Pumpington will soon give up me."

"Well, then, read that;" saying which he placed in his friend's hands the advertisement before alluded to, and lit a mighty regalia by a match which was placed ready upon the mantelpiece.

As Crackenthorpe said, it certainly looked well upon paper. The proposal had its charms, too, for Mr. Munster; who was one of those gentlemen, who, living far beyond their means, are obliged to be beholden to their wits. Fortunately Robert Munster, Esq., was not deficient in this respect. He had a father alive, from whom he received an uncertain income, and had certain expectations: whether they are to be realized or not we may see hereafter. He was an Irishman, as he affirmed, though long residence in England had enabled him to adopt or shake off just as much of his nationality as he pleased. He was an adept at most games; rode and shot moderately well; was never out of temper, nor out of countenance; frequently out of pocket; had been at Oxford and taken a degree; called himself a barrister, and was supposed to be eating himself to fame in the Temple Hall, instead of drinking himself into notoriety at Pump-

ington. He was a very amusing companion; highly susceptible; lived upon his friends as much as possible, and made no secret of doing so. He rode their horses, drank their wine, ate their dinners, and not unfrequently wore their clothes; but he was invaluable to the idle or the hypochondriac; and it was, after all, rather difficult to say on which side lay the obligation. It at once occurred to him that the horses would be as acceptable, and the port as good, in one place as another; and that his own share of expenses at Lushenham might be considerably lower than those which he was already incurring at Pumpington, for the necessities of lodging, washing, and the livery of two horses, which formed the basis of operations for attacks upon innumerable studs.

"Suppose we go at once: we can chat about our arrangements as we go; for there's not much time to lose between this and November."

"I can't go before to-morrow; besides, I must write to the agent for particulars; and, if it looks likely, we must get old Grabhall and Keepitt to see the agent, and do the parchments. I know nothing about that." Here Crackenthorpe took two prolonged yawns, a very hard pull or two at the regalia, which was beginning to fail under the interest of the conversation, and stated his intention of driving to Clench the dealer, to look at a hack which he thought might carry him to cover and go in harness next season. "Would Bobby go with him?" Of course he would: and on their way they ordered the fly which carried them to Lushenham the following morning.



## CHAPTER II.

### A GRASS COUNTRY.

WE have endeavoured to give a sufficient reason in our last chapter for the sudden appearance in an out-of-the-way village of two rather dashing young men in a Pumpington fly. The lady of the house, or in others words, Mrs. Simcox, the wife of the tenant of Boulter's Farm, received the two gentlemen in the best parlour, wiping and dusting down the chairs with her apron; ringing the bell for her maid, who, when she did appear, looked more like a cinder with a cap on than a human being; and tidying herself

with her unemployed hand during the proceedings. She apologized for the stupidity of the flyman and her own want of preparation in the same breath, and ended by asking in the most impressive manner what the gentlemen would take to drink this hot day. Simcox was up in the field; but he should be sent for immediately, as the young horse could not be seen out without his permission. He was so very particular—"Bless us, one 'ud think there was no more young Belzonis in the world." And if Mrs. Simcox knew as much about it as we do, she would have quite appreciated her husband's care. Both the gentlemen would take a glass of ale, which they did; and hoped Mrs. Simcox did not dislike smoking, which she did not; and then they told her that they were not come after the young horse, and her face fell. It rose again, however, before long, when they told her the real nature of their errand: thought it strange the agent did not let them know, and proceeded to expatiate upon the beauties of the situation, the fertility of the soil, and the excellence of the water, about the least interesting piece of intelligence that could have been conveyed to either the one or the other. To make matters plain, however, let us give a description of Lushenham and its advantages; and as we love truth, we will neither pale the lily nor paint the rose.

Lushenham is a small, and was an insignificant, village, until modern *furor* for hunting rescued it from its obscurity, and filled its neighbourhood with sportsmen, stud grooms, helpers, and the necessary adjuncts to the national taste. At the time of which we write, some few years ago, it consisted of straggling labourers' cottages; long low farm buildings, since converted into stables and boxes; an old-fashioned farm-house; a church, rectory, and schools; and the Hall, the Squire's residence, on the side of the hill, embowered in trees and shrubberies, and approached from the village by a long winding walk, always muddy, and generally unswept. It was situated in a valley, through which flowed a brook, even then famous in the annals of the chase; presenting at no point less than a good fourteen feet of water, and at most points from sixteen feet to twenty. Many a whip lies buried beneath its waters; possibly boots and spurs; for it is as muddy below as it is broad at the top; and, though we never heard of a hat with a head in it, we still think it possible that there are some mysteries at the bottom of Lushenham Brook that we know nothing about. The ground rises on every side of it: here and there steep: but usually in gentle slopes of rich grass which proclaim its capabilities for fattening oxen and blowing horses. Once on the top, the country discloses to view a succession of large pastures, yawning ditches, and thick timber rails, with venerable blackthorn fences, which have been ignorant

of the hand of the hedger for many a long year. The roads, to the civilized dweller in the south of England, are execrable as a rule, and only tolerable when, passing by a succession of gates through large fields, they present an opportunity for cantering along at increased speed. But to the true sportsman they are invaluable, as preserving the battered legs and feet of some old favourite, whose only remaining consolation, when his gallop is done, is the accumulation of mud through which it remains for him to reach his stable-door.

But what of the house, which appeared in the columns of the "Pumpington Gazette" under such flattering terms? Boulter's Farm was a straggling, old-fashioned farm-house, of a certain size, with low-pitched rooms and receding fireplaces, now decorated with evergreens; whilst the ceilings rejoiced in rashers of bacon and flint guns. There was a cheerful kitchen, which owned a range sufficient for the requirements of a dozen bachelors. The parlour was small, but snug; just the thing for winter; and the drawing-room was bright and sunny, capable of much display of taste, in the way of trellis-work outside, and hunting pictures and china within. The bed-rooms, five in number, were convenient in size, on the same floor, and smelling wonderfully of cheese. As far as the house was concerned, such was the impression left upon the mind of Tom Crackenthorpe and his friend.

"And now for the stabling, Mr. Simcox," said Tom, to that worthy individual, who had appeared at the summons of his wife, and relieved her of the outdoor duty. "Now for the stabling. Let me see—eight horses, loose-boxes, &c., and other conveniences."

"Certainly, gentlemen; mind the step. This way, if you please, sir," to Bobby Munster, who was about plunging into a tempting-looking reservoir of liquid manure. "Round here, sir," said the jolly farmer, as he picked his way through a very opulent-looking farm-yard. "This here's a young 'oss as I bred myself: he's by Belzoni, Young Belzoni, out of a Sir Marinal mare. He's a nice 'oss, very, gentlemen; capital at water and timber; and a Belzoni head all over."

"Well, it is a head all over," said Bobby Munster, who was struck with the size of it, if nothing else. "Now let's look at the stable."

"These *are* the stables, and them's the boxes, on the other side of the yard," said Mr. Simcox, as he waded through some more manure, and opened a series of dark wooden places, which gave evident signs of their occupation by bullocks.

"Airy," said Crackenthorpe, referring to the stables.

"His coat's a little early: had nothin' done to him," rejoined the farmer, referring to the four-year-old.

"Plenty of room for the wind," said Munster.

"Never see him blow," said Simcox, still on his hobby.

"They must all come down," continued Crackenthorpe, looking round in a rather disconsolate manner at the dilapidated boxes.

"The best on 'em falls at times," rejoined the farmer; "least-ways, if you rides 'em pretty straight."

The inspection of the stables and out-buildings seemed to give less unqualified approbation than the house; but there still appeared capabilities for improvement if the place could be taken on lease, or if the landlord was disposed to do the repairs. In this mind they returned to the house. Farmer Simcox would not hear of their leaving without a substantial luncheon, which they took at his dinner-hour. Mrs. Simcox was in great form. Her morning, or labouring, dress had been replaced by a most elaborate brown silk, bedaubed with sky-blue rosettes, the whole surmounted by a cap which resembled the Tower of Babel in titles of Moresque pattern. The farmer's hospitality was sincere, and his ale strong; and he entertained his guests with such marvels of the chase that before their fly was once more at the door Tom Crackenthorpe had made up his mind to set the celebrated firm of Grabhall and Keepitt upon the agent, to see what could be done towards putting Boulter's Farm in decent order before the ensuing winter. As to Simcox, he had arrived at that comfortable state of feeling by 3 p.m. that he would do anything to accommodate the gentleman, as to keeping the land or relinquishing it; and even proposed once more to have out the Belzoni colt and let the gentlemen see him jump, though the ground was a bit hard, to be sure.



### CHAPTER III.

#### THE IN-COMING TENANT OF BOULTER'S FARM.

THOMAS CRACKENTHORPE, the hero of our sketch—for he is the fellow we shall eventually marry to some one, after having pulled him through innumerable difficulties by flood and field—was the only son, we may say only child, of a West Indian merchant of large property, who dying, left a ladylike widow with a handsome jointure, and the bulk of his property to his only son, Tom. Having himself had some experience in the ups-and-downs of life, and knowing that the prudence of age is not a character-

istic of youth, he so managed matters that Master Thomas should not come into the bulk of his property until he was twenty-six ; although a handsome allowance was to be made for his educational career, and a thousand pounds per annum to be at his own disposal from the age of twenty-one years.

Old Mr. Crackenthorpe having departed this life at no very advanced period of age, from what he called liver, but what everybody else called an overdose of pine-apples and Madeira, the widow returned to Europe. On her way to England she visited the chief capitals, receiving numberless proofs of attachment from the disinterested young aristocrats of the Viennese army, and the democratic soldiers of *la jeune* France, in shape of offers of marriage. She had quite appreciation enough of the sentiments of her admirers, and of her own independent position, to decline, and consequently returned to England unscathed, with her son Tom, at that time between thirteen and fourteen years of age. Tom took more after his father in appearance than after the widow. He was dark instead of fair, and certainly no beauty to look at : but he was a jovial, good-humoured boy, generous and open-hearted, and a favourite with most people. A short consultation between the widow Crackenthorpe and the trustees decided upon his career. No young gentleman of such promising talents—for money always implies that—should waste his sweetness anywhere but at Eton : and if he could be induced to partake of the springs of that fountain of learning, Christchurch to follow would certainly fit him for the eminent position which all young men with eight or ten thousand pounds a year are presumed to occupy.

Never was the fitness of things so charmingly illustrated as in Tom's connection with Dr. Hawtrey. Tom hated work ; but had quite sufficient early education and natural sharpness to keep his place in the school, and to take his remove when custom expected him to do so. And Eton was not that harsh and severe stepmother, but a true *alma mater*, who looked with a lenient eye on the moderate exertions of the heir to thousands. Not that we mean to infer that, had he been the son of a pauper, whose existence depended on his industry, she would have troubled herself one iota upon the subject. We do Eton the justice to say, and all other great public schools of this country in the same manner, that for those who wish to work there is more opportunity than falls to the lot of others ; and for those who wish to be idle every facility for accomplishing their object is thrown in their way.

Tom early manifested a taste for sport of all kinds. He was fond of a badger ; he did not despise a cat ; but he dearly loved a fox. He was not great on the river, nor did his name appear in the Eleven at Lord's in those happy day when Greek met Greek, and Eton, Harrow, and Winchester were allowed their annual



matches in peace. He was a great authority on terriers, rough and smooth; and though he was at present denied any participation in the pleasures of the chase beyond those of a rat-hunt, he was a great amateur in the butchers' trotting-matches that occasionally came off in the neighbourhood of Slough. He was no mean pedestrian, and a great patron of the noble art of self-defence. With these varied accomplishments his mother and guardians could not but foresee a brilliant opening at the University of Oxford, and accordingly entered him at Christchurch before he had had time to attain the highest honours of Eton.

Here a more extensive field for his labours presented itself to the genius of Thomas Crackenthorpe. He became an honorary member of the Phoenix, an active one of the Bullingdon Clubs. During the summer he had usually a smartish galloper which got away with a strong lead, and not unfrequently caught the judge's eye at the finish. He had every conceivable coat, with every conceivable button. As winter approached he made the acquaintance of Mr. Drake, Jem Hills, and Lord Ducie, by exhibiting a sympathy in their pursuits quite touching, and even dangerous to his lengthened sojourn at the University. He was great amongst the Tollitts, and Brambles, and those few remaining samples of the old coaching days. He was not so attentive to the College Lectures and chapels as to the rendezvous at Charlie Symonds's: and grilled bones and burnt claret found him occupation in his hours of evening relaxation. He was a little short of the refinement of Lord Chinapot in his language and exterior; therefore that young aristocrat voted him a "snob;" whilst the Marquis of Larkingford vowed that Cracks was a capital fellow, and that Chinapot was a confounded ass. It is a law of nature that, when two bodies possessing different degrees of heat come together, the warmer gives out part of its heat to the colder, till the two come to an equality. It is a pity that Chinapot and Crackenthorpe could not have slept together for a night or two, or have been tossed in a blanket: it might have been better for both of them. As it is we forbear comment; but relate facts as they are. And as a considerable modification will be observed in the character of the one during the adventures we have undertaken to detail, so we hope Chinapot may have profited by his friction with the world, and appreciate the qualities of those who are moulded in a different form from his own.

Crackenthorpe's career at Oxford ended about the time he was coming of age; a little prematurely perhaps, but not by any means attended with circumstances over which the impartial historian would desire to throw a veil. It is true that he never took a degree: but it is equally true that he never went up for one. Who shall accuse him of incapability? His mother set it down

to failing health: poor fellow! he looked as strong and as black as a prison; his guardians, two worthy mercantile millionaires, to a natural desire to visit foreign countries. They say that the name of Crackenthorpe was found in the arm of the pink which decorated the Mercury when the Athenian blacksmith forbade the prosecution of the chase; but that 's a calumny, for the lining was torn out. Others believed him to have been concerned in decorating the oaks of the Dons with red paint; we never heard that he was a limner. The ladies aver that the wife of a high functionary sought him so rabidly for her too susceptible daughter, that he was obliged to abandon the place rather than to surrender at discretion. And as Tom has never contradicted the last, though he refuses to confirm the former current reports, we are almost inclined to think that he fell a victim to maternal cupidity. We are the more disposed to lean to this opinion from certain peculiarities with regard to mothers in general, totally irreconcilable with an open and unsuspicious disposition.

Such were the antecedents of the young gentleman who, after a couple of years' hunting and flirting at Pumpington, presented himself as a tenant of Boulter's Farm, in the parish of Lushenham.



## CHAPTER IV

### BACK AGAIN TO PUMPINGTON SPA.

HAVING taken a parting glass with the cheery old farmer, shaken hands with his wife, and lighted a couple of the largest regalias on record, Tom and his friend ascended the Pumpington fly once more. Two things struck them as singular on leaving the village—the postboy had evidently borrowed a saddle for the occasion, as he was now riding post; and he had as evidently partaken very liberally of the farm-house ale. If the parlour eating was sumptuous, there was no deficiency of drink in the kitchen; and fortune, which favours the bold, certainly stood his friend in getting clear of the village. The horses had been well fed upon Mr. Simcox's best old beans, and with their heads towards home, regarded neither children nor gate-posts.

Tom Crackenthorpe was disposed to think a little over his morning's inspection. The house was clearly a farm-house, and nothing more; it was a "retreat from the fatigues of business or

the haunts of pleasure" most undoubtedly; but it might depend very much upon the neighbourhood how far it would suit the retiring propensities of Tom and Bobby Munster. Then the garden was a mere square for the propagation of giant cabbages and winter greens, with a thick round Portugal laurel in the centre, surrounded by a circle of untrimmed box. Three or four standard roses and a bed of marigolds comprised the flower show. The stables were easily convertible into decent quarters for the Crackenthorpe stud, which with Bobby Munster's two, and the necessity of putting up a friend pretty well through the season, might number some seven or eight hunters and a hack. This was certainly the most lively part of the picture, and reconciled Mr. Crackenthorpe to all other inconveniences. A house that he could call his own, a bit of land, half a dozen loose boxes, and room for a friend, under the influence of the regalia seemed a positive elysium. He had begun to see just the place for his old horse by Harry Hall; his coach picture, a supposed Henderson; and the disposal of the china which had escaped the clumsiness of his scout, or the vagaries of his University friends, in the nooks and corners of the Boulter's Farm drawing-room; and was laying out money and grounds with a prodigal hand, when bump went the fly into the coping-stone of a narrow bridge, shooting the cigars into the opposite seats, and pitching the old gent, who acted as postboy, somewhere between the collar and the horses. Nothing more material happened at present than the waking Bob Munster from his nap, and Crackenthorpe from his reverie. The breeches and tops got back into their old places after an inelegant struggle; and as it is always supposed to be the horses' fault when the carriage runs where it ought not to run (as whose indeed should it be?), for the next three miles the pace was first-rate. The dust flew and the sun shone, and there could be nothing remarkable in the necessity for watering the horses after a seven-mile ride, three of which had been done at a hard gallop. The two insides therefore made no remonstrance when the fly pulled up at the Green Dragon, and with tottering and uneven steps the boy descended from the pig-skin. He proceeded at once towards the door, mindful of his own necessities, and not of his fare.

"Now then, stupid, open the door," said Mr. Munster.

"Lor' bless me, if I ain't forgotten you gents. Now then, sir, lean upon me!"

"Lean upon you, you old idiot?" replied Bob. "Why, you're drunk; very drunk. Look at him, Tom."

And here I regret to say Mr. Tom Crackenthorpe indulged in some very unseemly merriment at the expense of his driver. Age should always be respected, and the boy might have been the father of either of them.

After waiting some ten minutes, by which time the chaise had recovered its equilibrium, the cattle their wind, and Bob Munster his spirits, the postboy, more tipsy than ever, presented himself with a short clay pipe, and his whip under his arm.

"Now, sir, if you please," said he, with an amount of politeness which nearly overbalanced him, "if you're goin' inside, I'm a goin' outside."

"Yes; but not with that pipe," said Mr. Crackenthorpe; "so out with it at once, and don't stand there like a fool. Now get on your horse," as he saw the offensive clay presented to the sympathizing ostler, "and mind you don't break your neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha—my neck! well, that's capital, capital to be sure," said the boy, as he clambered once more on to his horse, and started with a lurch that nearly sent him off again.

"What do you think of the house, Bobby?"

"I've seen a man very drunk in a very much smaller one."

"No doubt; and will again, when you get back to the Temple. But do you think it would suit us?"

"That depends entirely upon circumstances—not mine, you know, Tom, for I haven't any money at all. But if you like to take it, I'll come with you, and bring the horses, and have all things in common; and then you know I——"

"Oh! never mind about that; we'll settle that afterwards. I think I'd better go up to town, and see Grabhall and Keepitt, before I go to Scotland. We might get in next season, if we did the stables, and rough it."

"You'd bring the claret and champagne, I suppose, and I'd find the cook; or, stay, you take the cook, and I'll get the wine," said Bobby, brightening and puffing out a cloud of Tom Crackenthorpe's tobacco smoke. "You might find the cigars, too, if you think the wine's too much for me."

"I don't care which arrangement you make."

"Well, you're the ready-money bird, and the cook will want his wages. I must keep my ready-money for the pikes and the railway—everything else goes on tick."

"Except that clock of Dent's, which I——. Good heavens! what's become of the postboy?"

True enough he was gone; the horses had reduced themselves to a foot's pace, and, as the box of the fly was not easy to see through, Tom had only just missed their drunken conductor.

"Jump out, Bobby, on your side."

"I'd rather jump out on my feet," said Bob; and, opening the door, he let himself out and stopped the horses, who seemed noways loth. It was quite clear what had happened to their driver. About fifty yards back, in the middle of the road, sat the late occupant of the saddle; he was bolt upright, as far as a

figure like his could be, and was roaring to an imaginary somebody to stop his horses. Of any further exertion he was quite incapable; nor did he seem the least inclined to attempt it. Upon endeavouring to raise him from the ground, however, which was no light task, they perceived, what had not been apparent before, that he was deformed—one shoulder was higher than the other, and, as he now sat on the ground, showed itself with extraordinary prominence.

"How odd!" said Tom; "I never saw that before. Now, then, are you going to get up, or to stay here all the evening?"

"All the evening," said the drunken vagabond.

At that moment there came by a respectably dressed man, who good-naturedly volunteered to assist.

"Bless me, poor fellow!" said he, upon closer examination, "he's put his shoulder out."

"Has he really?" said Bobby Munster.

"Undoubtedly."

"Then let's put it in for him," said the other.

And, without more ado, Crackenthorpe and Munster on one side and the good-natured Samaritan on the other set to work to pull his shoulder in again. I've heard of washing a nigger white, but it would be an easy task compared to what they had undertaken. Albeit, two of the three roared with laughter, whilst the drunken victim struggled in vain against their tender solicitude.

"Wa-a-as th' matter?" inquired he.

"Your shoulder's out, you old fool; sit still, or you'll have it in a terrible state."

"Born-n-n so-o-o," murmured the sufferer.

"What does he say?" roared Bob. "Tough old cock it is; hang'd if I can move it! Now, then, once more; a real good one; I hear it giving."

And, applying a good vigorous pull on both sides, crack went the coat up the middle of the back, and down went the vigorous bone-setters on both sides.

"Tell yer, I was born so," again roared the drunken postboy.

"Good gwacious," said the terrified stranger, "he says he was born so; what a singular mistake! But what are we to do with him, gentlemen? We can't leave him in the road in this state, and there's no house within miles, that I know of."

"Can you ride, Tom? because if not we must walk. How many miles is it to Pumpington?"

"Five miles; rather better. Unfortunately there's no public near."

"Put him inside," said Tom Crackenthorpe; "I'll ride; it's the only thing to be done. Can we give you a lift?"

"No thank you; I'd just as soon walk."

"Well, Munster, old fellow, you get upon the box, unless you like to go inside with the boy." Here, however, it occurred to Tom Crackenthorpe that he couldn't ride in trousers, excepting at the expense of his right leg.

"Take his boots off," said Bob, who was usually pretty fertile in expedients. "Too short, by Jove! so they are. Give us a knife."

"No, no, Bob; they'll fit you. You ride and I'll go on the box. Now, then, in with him, and pull up the shutters."

After some little altercation, this seemed to be as good an arrangement as could be arrived at under the circumstances; and away they went for Pumpington.

To any person who has not tried it, the process of riding a tired post-horse in a fly may appear easy and pleasant enough. Walking, which I admit I dislike (and I have tried both), is far preferable. Of course the pleasure is not enhanced by the peculiarity of an ordinary morning dress; and, though the company of your nearest friend on the box, adds something to your moral courage, a drunken postboy inside, who may become unruly at any moment, counterbalances in some degree the enjoyment.

On the present occasion everything went well. As they approached the Spa, and ladies and gentlemen began to appear—some returning from their afternoon ride, and others in search of health by a post-prandial canter—curiosity was awakened by the glossy appearance of the postillion's hat, and his unusually neat collars and appurtenances. The valet's aristocratic get-up was quite in keeping with the ordinary features of that hard-working, ill-paid class of persons, as he lounged on the box, smoking a cigar, with his hat drawn over his eyes in a half-somnolent state. It was thought possible that, in nearing the town, some outstanding public might furnish a rider; and, exchange being no robbery, might accept of the invalid inside as a deposit. Unfortunately no such chance offered; and, with a decision well worthy of himself and the comparative security of his position, Tom Crackenthorpe determined upon proceeding at once to "The George," the great hotel of the town, the temporary residence of himself and his friends, and the head-quarters of the aristocracy of Pumpington. This was a bold step of Master Tom; but, I suppose, he knew his licence and its extent nearly as well as he was known.

"Now, then, Bobby, push on, it will soon be over; keep your head down, and turn up the tails of your coat: nobody here ever saw you in a short jacket," said he to Munster, who showed symptoms of pulling up to remonstrate. "You're not very unlike the boy, now that we've put his shoulder in, I should think."



Somehow or other they were already unconsciously in the little suburbs of the town, and it seemed almost easier to go on than to stop; the latter undertaking only courted observation. At this moment the draught horse nearly came down on his head; Bobby pulled him together, and with three or four vigorous applications of the whip, set him going again in first-rate form.

"Keep some of that to go up the Parade with, Robert," said Tom, roaring with laughter, and quite quit of his former bashfulness.

To do Munster justice, nothing abashed *him*, and he played away busily at the worn-out cattle, as he dashed over the little bridge at the bottom of the Parade. The jerks and the stones had had their effect, too, upon the inside passenger, who, upon an acceleration of pace, had been shaken into a sort of consciousness, and, though not recollecting much of the circumstances of the ride, detected, by a sort of instinct, the inside of his master's fly. He was just able to let down the shutters, and just drunk enough to put his bootless legs through the one window, whilst his torn coat and listless arm hung outside of the other. This added greatly to the general effect, and would have been appreciated by Tom Crackenthorpe, had he only been conscious of the great addition this made to the otherwise unostentatious display.

"Now, Bob, put on the steam; here comes Clara Jones and the old lady."

And, true enough, in crinoline of most ample dimensions, and a love of a pork pie, under the convoy of a wide-spreading silk and a Solferino parasol, came the young lady of Robert Munster's heart. I do not think Bob was capable of a real first-class passion, but he was sufficiently fond of himself to know that a ridiculous position does not increase your chance of success with your mistress. For my part, I believe a woman can forgive anything but that. As Clara swept past, however, Bob ventured one look, and then he saw the bootless legs well out of the window, as helpless and disorderly as legs could be.

"Dash it, Cracks; look at the window!" said Bob. "And here comes old General Bulrush and the girls; shall we stop, or turn round?"

"Turn round? no; dash it! sit down on your horse, and powder along. Confound the fellow! he looks like a corpse, with those cursed legs of his hanging out of the window. Mind you don't injure the body as you go round the corner!"

General Bulrush and the ladies all stopped to have a look at the novel effect, and recognised the driver, though they had no idea who the inside might be. "Disgraceful!" said he; "Shocking!" said Emily; "Horrible!" said Charlotte; "Lor', dear," said Miss Marian, who was very fond of Tom; "perhaps he's dead, and they can't help bringing him home, you know."

As this was said aloud, it didn't take long to reach the bottom of the Parade, where Mrs. Sparkes and her daughters, old Bumfoozle and his niece, and that cheerful little body Miss Bridget Macdawdell, were just turning out of the gardens.

"Dead? bless me!" said Miss Bridget: "how shocking!"

"Yes, my dear, quite dead," said Mr. Jones, who joined her very opportunely: "I saw his legs, and Clara was so shocked she has scarcely recovered it." *Fama crescit cundo.* Very true.

The following morning two middle-aged ladies—there are no old women at Pumpington, and *middle-aged* means just half-way between fifty and a hundred—met at the Pump-room.

"Very serious case this, ma'am, I fear. I have just met Mr. Sparkes, the lawyer, on his way to see Mr. Crackenthorpe on particular business; he says he believes he will leave the country. It's only man-slaughter; but it's a very serious case. And the poor man leaves a family behind."

"But you don't mean to say that he's dead, Mrs. Markby? Dear, dear! what will poor Marian Bulrush do?"

"Well, I don't know; but poor Clara Jones is quite beside herself." Here the old lady, who had only one eye, squinted horribly.

"And how did it happen, Mrs. Markby?"

"Well, ma'am, I don't rightly know; but let us hope accidentally. There's no doubt at all that somehow or other Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster have killed a postboy."



## CHAPTER V.

### A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

OLD Sparkes was the thriving lawyer at Pumpington. He knew everybody, and everybody's business; and he had scraped together a very nice little property, which would be divided between his children, two boys and three girls, at his death. Not that he thought of dying yet, by any means. A man who is eternally engaged in conveying property from others to himself, in drawing marriage contracts, making wills, and managing estates, has no time to die. The world of Pumpington would have stood still without Old Sparkes. Then, he was a bit of a sportsman; that is, he kept two horses, wore stiff coloured chokers well starched, long straight-cut waistcoats, tight trousers, and single-buttoned straps;

his boots were highly polished, and his gloves of the most elaborate and imperishable doeskin. He collected the subscription for the county hounds, was honorary secretary to the Pumpington Hunt Club, and always took the vice-chair at the sporting meetings, which were considered necessary for the discussion of the haunch, and the business in the autumn and spring of every year. He was great at the Spa; and was not in the habit of being contradicted, excepting at home. He was the greatest man in the town, and his wife was a greater. Indeed, Mrs. Sparkes might have said with the popular Mr. Buckstone, "My father was the strongest man in all Kentucky, and I walloped my father."

When Tom and his friend had safely deposited the drunken postboy in the hands of the ostler, by whom he was immediately consigned to some clean straw in the stable in company with a kicking mare and a broken-winded fly-horse, they proceeded to dinner in the coffee-room. It then occurred to them that, before completing any arrangement in connection with Boulter's Farm they might save some time, and not a little money, by paying a visit, a friendly visit, to Lawyer Sparkes. It is but justice to Mrs. Sparkes to say that she was hospitality itself—a personification of the goddess Vesta, in *glacé* silks and a handsome cap; and though she has been known to turn her back and close her doors upon fighting O'Brien of the 41st Cuirassiers, it was not till he had enjoyed four seasons of unexampled encouragement on her part, and was then discovered to have only a hundred a year besides his pay, and to be irretrievably involved. Tom Crackenthorpe and Bobby Munster were only in their second season; and the presumed resources of the former, and a sort of splendid mystery connected with a fine old property in Connemara which attached to the latter, quite absolved them from the suspicion of any such catastrophe. The well-greased portals opened at their first application to the door-bell; and Mrs. Sparkes's own man, well tutored in a Pumpington detrimental or the reverse, announced, with well-founded confidence, Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster.

"Now, this is kind of you; this is what Sparkes does so enjoy"—and I always know when the mistress is master, by this wanton use of his name—"he will be so pleased: Amelia dear, go and tell your father. Ah! Mr. Munster, you know what the demand upon the time of professional men must be;" and here she leered at Bob, as if he were an embryo Lord Chancellor.

"I do, indeed, Mrs. Sparkes; but I couldn't resist the pleasure of accompanying Mr. Crackenthorpe for an hour, if you will excuse so unceremonious a visit. I wish we could adopt generally the comfortable custom of Paris."

"Ah! dear delightful Paris! I remember when Sparkes and I were——:" but here Amelia returned with Old Sparkes, who had

been paying his professional visit to some '20 port, and had just been roused from a nap in the dining-room, where he had forgotten to shake out the crumbs from his napkin before he put it over his head in lieu of a nightcap. The necessity of greeting the old boy broke off Mrs. Sparkes's experiences of Paris life; and two more daughters entering the room, and a brother, a newer edition only of Sparkes *père*, the conversation became general.

"Been out to look at the young hounds yet, Mr. Crackenthorpe? Some capital entries!"

"Not yet. I can't get up," said Tom.

"But you must get up. Just what we want: young men must take an interest in the thing."

"My dear Sparkes, you forget," said the lady; and he had certainly forgotten the presence of his wife; "young men like Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster live for something more than those nasty dogs."

They certainly did; for everything else, from a bull-bait to a sham-fight, which could add to their earthly enjoyment.

"I hardly know," said Tom, "whether we shall be here another winter. Munster talks of setting up for a country gentleman. I'm afraid he has been disappointed in love."

"Oh, quite impossible!" said the lady, who wished he'd try them.

"Quite impossible!" said Sparkes, who foresaw the loss of a subscription: and this time she didn't contradict him.

"And where are you going to?" said Amelia, with a long-drawn sigh.

"Not a great way from here," sighed Bob, *sotto voce*; "so we should still run over occasionally."

"Dear me! I thought you might be going to that horrid Ireland."

"We heard of a place at Lushenham that would suit us just for the winter months, if it could be had on lease, and put into tenantable repair." Tom seemed to think the sooner the announcement was made the better, that the ladies might get over it.

"Lushenham, Lushenham! I know all about Lushenham," said Lawyer Sparkes, who smelt a job, if he could but get it: and he thought, if they were to go, he might as well profit by the move.

"Do you really? how fortunate! we want to know all about it."

"Bless you, Mr. Crackenthorpe! I know all about it. I'll settle it for you in a day or two. Send over my clerk Jobson—shrewd fellow, Jobson; have all the particulars in no time. What's the name of the property?" said he, moving to a writing-

table, and checking off the heads on a sheet of paper. "Boulter's Farm?—do it all for friends like you." Judging by his friends, it would have been curious to know what he did for his enemies. "Close to the church?—delightfully convenient: just pay for the stamps, you know, a mere trifle."

"But," began Bob, who was not of so easy a temperament as Tom Crackenthorpe, "we have scarcely——"

"Don't say a word, we'll have all the information for you by the day after to-morrow. Thursday—yes, say Thursday. Come in and take your dinner, and we'll talk the matter over. Half-past six, punctually; and now, Amelia, give us a little music. Let's have that fine old glee, 'A Southerly Wind;' you three girls can sing it, and George and I will join in. Come, Mr. Munster, I know you sing. I've heard you sing 'Little Billee;' charming song, quite in the old ballad style." And here Mr. Sparkes broke up the conference. It was clear nothing could save them but the sudden death of the eminent Jobson.

By the time of the evening muffin-bell of the next day, the whole of Pumpington was made aware of the intended or proposed removal of two of its more familiar stars. The women, as a body, were inconsolable: the old ones, because new causes of attraction for their muffin struggles had to be sought out; and then it was very doubtful whether such truly successful ones as Tom Crackenthorpe and Bob Munster were to be lightly met with: the young ones, because, if Tom was not altogether a lady's man, he was not averse to a good honest flirtation, where neither could do the other material damage, and where, if he kept off some, he brought others on; and because Bobby Munster, since the days of old Elliston, was, without any exception, the best gentleman lover (not to be in earnest) that had been seen in Pumpington. None of the people are in earnest in anything at the Spa, except the old—I mean the middle-aged—ladies, and the swindlers; there's no reality at all about the youngsters: so that the really good make-believes become very valuable. The male sex, to a man, were sorry to lose such admirable pickings as they got at the Crackenthorpe table, billiard and otherwise; for he was as unsuspicious and liberal as a bankrupt layer of the odds on a great event: and though Bobby was much too wary a gentleman to be caught, and rather resembled the wolf than the lamb, his company was always worth the money to those who were pleased to act Amphitryon. He rather, indeed, resembled the fox, of which that gentleman is said to have gone in chase: the dog and the fox were both so clever, that Jupiter, not to prolong the contest, turned them into stone. I think some of the old hands had their suspicions as to whether this fox was so well worth skinning. Ready-money Bob, as he was called at Ch. Ch., had great expectations,

as you or I may have, or anybody else; but the women do jump so at conclusions!

The trading population was *au désespoir*. Tom Crackenthorpe's liberality had extended to four times his income; and the grand-seigneur airs of Bobby Munster stood for an unknown quantity—*Omne ignotum pro magnifico*. They were a great loss in their way. For Tom always paid when he could; and Bobby was equally honest, by assuring that he never should be able to pay for anything. "Nice thing in bracelets, Mr. Munster," said Argent the jeweller; "and here's a charming watch—age of the moon, day of the month and week, and probable state of the weather; very cheap!" "Very nice, indeed; but I've no money." "O that don't signify, sir; ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Argent. "You'll want it some day, you know." "We'll take our chance about that, sir." "Well," said Bob, "I'll take the bracelet; but I shall never be able to pay." "O yes, you will, sir; you'd better take the watch too, it's very cheap; only twelve-ten." "Then good morning, Argent. I'll be hanged, Tom, if that fellow don't deserve to suffer: he won't believe an honest man, he's dealt so long with rogues."

Mr. Jobson enjoyed his drive to Lushenham exceedingly. His driver did not enjoy the hospitality of Farmer Simcox, but got the stomach-ache at the village public. The consequence was a safe and satisfactory return. Of course, he found out nothing but the address of the London agent. He might have saved himself the journey by looking in the "County Gazette," where Crackenthorpe had seen it. It is not impossible that he knew it already. However, that night's post carried off an official communication from Messrs. Sparkes and Dribble, which was satisfactorily answered in course of post. The property could be had on lease—seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, with the refusal, at so much, if it should be sold; the owner to make such repairs and alterations as should be agreed upon, and the tenant to keep it in habitable condition; fixtures for consideration. Land or not, at the tenant's option, and timber at a valuation. And as Old Sparkes read the letter, he saw a very pretty stroke of business; unless, as his wife said, one of the in-going tenants should happen to propose, and then Sparkes must allow for it in the bill.

Thursday came, and half-past six with it. And five minutes later came Crackenthorpe and Munster. They had said very little about Lushenham to their friends, and not much to each other, determined to wait the intelligence which Lawyer Sparkes was collecting for them.

"Now, Mr. Crackenthorpe, will you take Mrs. Sparkes? Mr. Munster, my daughter Amelia; and you, Jemima, must put up with your father till you can get some one better. Lead the

way, Mr. Crackenthorpe; we'll reverse the order of things to-day."

The dinner was excellent; Sparkes was in good spirits; a shade of interesting sadness sat upon Amelia, characteristic of the melancholy occasion. Munster looked once or twice at his neighbour, and thought she was a very good-looking girl, considering the length of her nose. Amelia was only wondering who would replace Bobby; and whether he would really swallow the bait, or only dance round it. As to hanging on with a man who lived twenty miles distant, and who only came over occasionally, the thing was simply ridiculous. Altogether, the party enjoyed itself exceedingly. The dinner, we said, was good. Three or four glasses of champagne each gave a little company-look to an otherwise family circle; for Sparkes was no niggard of good things, and made others pay for them; and when the ladies retired, which they did in good time, one bottle of the '20 port, and as much '44 claret as you liked, was afterwards at your service. Men whom he insulted by his charges, he conciliated by his wine. The business was not long in transacting. The lawyer placed in brief detail before his compulsory clients the intelligence we have already given the reader; and, before many minutes, had quite supplanted Messrs. Grabhall and Keepitt.

"You must have it; Jobson says 'it's the very thing:' shrewd fellow, Jobson; and I'll do the rest of it; only leave it to me as a friend."

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*," thought Munster.

"Do you know anything of the neighbourhood?"

"Bless you, yes—every man, woman, and child; that is, every man, woman, and child that ought to be known. There's Partington, the vicar—rather, a psalm-singer—and his wife and two daughters. I hope you are not susceptible, or she'll certainly make you marry one a-piece! It's an unfortunate number; with three, four, or six, now, you might have had a chance."

Crackenthorpe laughed, and thought they had plenty of experience at Pumpington. What did Mr. Sparkes think of a ball?—they talked of giving one before leaving. They couldn't ask the ladies to a dinner. Of course the ladies would be charmed. He, for his part, was not much of a man for balls; but the first consideration was the ladies.

"What, no more claret? just one more bottle: rather not? Well, then, suppose we join them?"

Sparkes had done his duty: it was Mrs. Sparkes's turn now.

## CHAPTER VI.

## PREPARATIONS FOR SLAUGHTER.

MRS. SPARKES was delighted at the suggestion of a bachelors' ball. What amiable female, with a handsome turban and three unmarried daughters, is not? Balls were the delight of her soul; and bachelors understood that sort of thing so well. The good woman kindly undertook to do the touting for Tom, and ascertain what success he was likely to meet with amongst the mothers and daughters of Pumpington Spa. There certainly could not be much doubt on her mind that, if a ball were given and a supper were spread, there would be plenty to dance at the one and eat at the other. In three days' time she announced to Tom Crackenthorpe that he had nothing to do but fix his day and send out his cards, as far as the Spa was concerned: and she numbered up, on her fingers, so many certain acceptances, that she should have been a perfect Briareus to get them all in. There was herself, and the Joneses, and the Bulrushes, who had been sadly shocked at the murder of the postboy, but discovering it to be only manslaughter, had waived the point in favour of such a very excellent young man. The reverend the vicar must decline for himself and Mrs. Primrose, having no daughters; but he would send his curate, who was bound to do the dancing for both, and was a very nice young man, too. General Hazy had promised to come, with his one-eyed sister and his only daughter. Sir MacShanus O'Toole and the Misses O'Toole would be "delighted;" and Barclay of Dingle Bogie, who was always addressed as "Bogie," according to the old Gaelic fashion, after his estate, "wadna say nay to sic innocent festeevities." The Scotchman, too, had a lovely daughter, who lost no opportunity of exhibiting the family cairngorm—now on her head, now on her neck, occasionally on her band before, and anon on her band behind. To sum up all in one word, as a guarantee for the respectability of the whole affair, the Honourable Biddy Raccoon, an irreproachable young woman of fifty, had promised to give her countenance, if her brother, Lord Kangaroo, would escort her. Kangaroo was not fond of going out after dinner, but on an occasion like that she thought he might be persuaded to strain a point. The baron was fond of his rubber as well as of his sister, and would rather have lost the latter than the former at any time.

This being the case, there seemed little to do but to order the fiddlers and supper at once. Both were to be of the first quality. Pumpington has always been famous for its "tanz-musik;" and,



to do them justice, the young couples kept their hands in pretty well. What with the Orthopædic Hall Ball, and the Race Ball, and the Hunt Ball, and the quarterly assemblies, and the *hebdomadal the' dansante*—as a muffin-struggle and a waltz was politely called, the worshippers of Terpsichore were not idle at Pumpington. But, then, there was this difference: at each of these a mother and three daughters were valued at two guineas the lot; now they were invaluable, and somebody else was going to pay the piper. I regret to have to record this vulgar sentiment; but those who know the Spa, and love truth, will forgive me. It was quite clear that this would be the ball of the season. There were to be no cleaned gloves nor soiled satin slippers; and the least that could be done to the tulle dresses was a new slip of more than usually ample folds. All the milliners of the place were put in requisition at once; and Mrs. Jones and the “Bogie’s” daughter struggled violently for the last journeyman workwoman in the place. She fell to the lot of Mrs. Jones, by the ill-timed economy of Dingle Bogie, who was driven into the arms of Madame Grisette, of South Molton Street, and mulcted in the penalty of a five-pound note, which carried off one month’s winnings at the club.

“Well, Clara dear,” said Marian Bulrush to her charming friend, “shall you wear your white dress, looped up with pink roses? I hope you will; it is so becoming.”

Marian had declared at home, and it was generally agreed, that nothing suited Clara so well as blue; and that the white and pink was the very acme of vulgarity.

“Of course I shall,” said Clara; “I can’t afford any more new dresses this season.”

Mrs. Hemstitch was at that moment employed, for life or death, upon a charming pale-blue silk, which had arrived from town only the day before.

“What a lovely wreath you had on at Mrs. Markby’s on Thursday, Amelia!” said Fanny Grizzell to Miss Sparkes. “I never saw you look so well. Where did you get it?”

“Papa bought it for me at Michel’s the last time he was in town. I’m so glad you admire it,” said Amelia, who had taken it off after the night in question, vowing that nothing short of utter bankruptcy should ever induce her to decorate her auburn locks with scarlet japonicas again; and had just secured the most exquisite bunch of corn-flowers and poppies that could possibly be conceived. In fact, if ever the young ladies of Pumpington had been bent upon astonishing their best friends by a pleasant surprise or two, it was to be on the night of the Crackenthorpe ball.

It must not be supposed that the gentlemen were idle in the

mean-time. What with new boots, or new patent varnish for the old ones; what with new cuffing and collaring the old coats, which were getting towards the end of their season, and the silk facings, required on this popular occasion, the local "schneiders" were kept in full employ. I presume, that no one ventured upon building a coat or trousers at Pumpington. Some of the very young men were nibbling at some waistcoat patterns; if not so new as they might be, loud enough for anything. Most of them had decided upon a bouquet from the provincial Covent Garden, or from the floriculturist at the bottom of the Parade; for these amiable young men all affected, or felt, the tender passion more or less, and found a language in flowers, which they took care to find nowhere else. When the notes of invitation were sent out, too, it was astonishing how anxious everybody was to let Tom or his friend Bobby see that they were at the Spa. They had both become exceedingly popular with the men, as well as the women; and the bitterness of their rivals were suddenly converted into their warmest admirers. Tom Crackenthorpe was really a very good fellow on the whole; but it was astonishing how little he was appreciated by the men after the women had taken him up. Bobby Munster's vagaries were so irreconcilable with what are called serious intentions, that he was regarded in a less suspicious light. There are very few men who achieve greatness in both lines.

"Look at that ass Crackenthorpe spooning Lydia Slowcome," said young Butterson to his friend Jack Halston, who had often tried the same game in the same quarter ineffectually; "did you ever see such hoofs in your life?"

Butterson was proud of his feet.

"Tom's not half a bad fellow," replied Jack, who was not over partial to Butterson; "he always 'parts' like a man, and that's something in this wicked world. You know you're jealous of him, Butty."

"Jealous of Cracks! come, that's rather too good," replies Butty, looking down at his patent leathers, and wondering when they were likely to be paid for. "And here comes Munster, making a fool of little Clara Jones. What an idiot old mother Jones must be to stand that sort of thing!"

"I rather think it's Clara that's making a fool of him," said Jack Halston, who had an incipient passion for Clara herself, with which nothing but whiskey and water and chicken-hazard interfered. "Well, Lushington, how are you? Look at Munster."

"Munster? where is he? I must say how-d'ye-do to him. I haven't seen him this age."

Lushington had not had an "at home," or whatever the two bachelors called their notes of invitation, and thought it desirable just now to forget his private jealousies in his zeal for the public

service. Lushington felt that no ball could really be perfect without him.

"So I hear you and Crackenthorpe are going to leave the Spa this season. 'Pon my honour, I'm deuced sorry."

"You ought to be very glad," said Bobby.

"I don't exactly see that," rejoined Lushington, with one of his blandest smiles. "Pumpington won't look like the same place without you two fellows."

"You'll have it all to yourself, you know, when we're gone," said Munster, with an easy *nonchalance* which almost shut up Lushington; who, however, returned once more to the charge, wondering whether he hadn't better try Crackenthorpe. "I suppose we shall see you at the Giles's to-morrow—everybody's going. I delight in dancing, though the rooms are small. There's nothing, after all, like a good big room with plenty of light, and a good after supper dance. I like it almost as much as hunting."

"In some respects it's less dangerous. Good-bye! I am going for a ride with the Sparkeses."

And Bobby Munster had turned the corner before Lushington had quite recovered from the vigour of his own assault.

It is almost needless to observe that Crackenthorpe and his friend were in the mean-time immersed in anxieties rather than business. There was nothing very formidable in giving orders; but when it comes to seeing how they are executed, for the criticism of other people, the hardest philosopher must have his moments of doubt. Would the lighting be good? the band remain sober? and the champagne last out? Would the supper be standing up, or sitting down? and were the oysters and porter in the little back-room for particular friends, who always, like oysters, are certain to arrive on the day? Then the invitations. If the Podgers were asked—and old Podgers was not a bad fellow for a retired sugar-baker—what was to be done about the Hodgkinsons? They would be furious, if left out. There was the mayor, too, a retired tinman, who gave good dinners, and many of them—he must be invited. Wouldn't the aldermen expect cards too? "No," said Bobby; "ask the mayor, and let him bring his corporation with him—he's well able to do so." Jobson had a deadly feud with Mr. Bates; Jobson must be asked, and Julia Bates was the prettiest girl in the county. Then there was the 365th Regiment Connaught Fire-eaters, who must be asked to a man, as the colonel was constantly driving into Pumpington from the barracks, and had given a ten-pound note to the Covers. Every individual sub would have considered himself personally insulted by neglect of summons. Gorsehamptonshire was a very stronghold of eligible young men, who were ready to go anywhere, do anything, or lay any amount of odds. Many of

Tom's present friends were members of the Gorsehamptonshire Hunt; and if he meant to go to Lushenham, he might have many more. Lord Cropperton was an M.F.H., an earl (that would gladden all hearts, with an undiminished rent-roll, a most unpromising foxhunter, a Ch. Ch. friend of Crackenthorpe's, and a very good fellow, who was sure to do justice to the oysters and porter. There is no doubt that Ned Bingham would have felt more at home crossing the Coplow, damaging the turnip-tops, at "The Bells," at Putney, or delivering the upper-cut, than in La Poule or the Polka Mazurka. But Ned was second to none in Tom's estimation; and he must be persuaded to invest in a pair of lemon-coloured kids and some "Vernis de Paris" on an occasion like the present. In his way, too, he was a lion, who preferred riding up and down stairs to the ordinary method of mounting and descending the "escalier" of his hotel, after jumping his horse over the side-board or the plate-warmer, and would be expected to escort his sisters, two of the prettiest girls on that side of the country. In fine, after running their eye over a list of about two hundred people, some of whom were useful, some ornamental, some necessary, and some politic additions to the success of the ball, both Tom and Bobby got so utterly confused that they allowed matters to take their chance, and proposed a day or two in London to recruit their spirits after such unwonted labours.

"We'll just go up to town," said Crackenthorpe, "have a quiet dinner or two, and see if there's anything else wanting."

"We'll just go to a theatre or two," said Bobby Munster, "and make a night of it; and I'll see if I can't draw the Governor for a hundred. I haven't seen him since the last rent-day at Connemara."

It occurred to Tom, however, just before starting, that the patronage of a lady of his own family might not be unadvisable. His mother was at Torquay, and, as by no means an ineligible person to represent the family in such a scene, he sat down and wrote the following pleasant little note to her:—

"Pumpington, Aug. 19.

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—This is a very nice quiet place for recruiting the purse and the spirits, after the heat of Rotten Row, and the mudlarks, and whitebait dinners of Greenwich. Besides which having been here for two or three years consecutively, I feel more at home than on the coast. We are a very pleasant set here. Your old acquaintance, Munster, came down with me, as he is very hard up, and wants to live quietly. He has only two horses to begin the season, so I must do what I can to give him a mount or two. The people here never seem to change. The Sparkeses are just the

same as when you knew them the season before last: the young ladies are very civil, and Amelia and Munster as thick as thieves. If he does not take care he will be caught some fine day. Clara Jones is making fierce love to Jack Halston, who has just had some money left him, though I don't think she cares about him. And Mrs. Jones has been to Doctors' Commons in search of my poor father's will. It cost several shillings, and she did not hit upon it at last. Should you like Marian Bulrush for a daughter-in-law? The General pretends to be shocked at the drunken post-boy; but Marian and her mother don't seem to think anything of it. At least I've had two dreadful teas and a family dinner since, with some severe pumping about Halston's legacy, which has varied from thirty-five to ten thousand. It is really four, and will last him about a twelvemonth. I have just taken, or am about taking, a cottage at Lushenham, a village on the borders of Gorsehamptonshire. Old Sparkes has managed it for me as a friend. Munster says that means at twice the usual expense, which is all he knows of law at present. I don't think Sparkes would like to shock either of us at this moment: he is said to have great filial affection. The O'Tooles make a great push for the Cropperton estates; but his Lordship is much too wide awake to be taken alive by the Galway brogue; and even the big brother, with an explanation of his intentions, didn't move him. Bingham takes great care of him, and when he is here, makes us all go to church on Sundays. If you had a house where you might ask Bingham, and, just as a companion to yourself, one of his sisters: they are quiet sort of people, not bad-looking. Bingham is older than ever. He is not a lady's man; but I remember he used to talk to you more than to most people.

"But what I wrote to you for particularly was to ask a favour. As the people here, especially the women have been very civil to us, Bob and I have arranged to give a ball on the 29th. Of course, a good many are away in the Highlands and at the sea-side. However, we shall muster pretty strong; and it would give me so much pleasure if you would let me take rooms here for you for a month, or a shorter time if you wish it. You look rather young for the place; but as you *are* my mother that won't signify. If you will just receive the company, you can dance as much as you like afterwards. Now, do come, my dear mother, and bring the most becoming dress you have with you.

"Believe me, your affectionate son,

"THOMAS CLIVE CRACKENTHORPE."

Of course he sealed it; and, of course, he directed it; and, as a natural consequence, it went to the post. A few hours after, Tom and Munster had gone to town.

## CHAPTER VII.

## IN LONDON.

LONDON is not a gay place at the latter end of August; at least, it requires a remarkably good digestion to make it so. I say a good digestion, for I hold that to be the *summum bonum*; and the inventor of light dinners and forty-four claret, next to the man who first dreamt of sleep, is the greatest benefactor mankind has seen. Crackenthorpe and Munster were, as yet, pretty well off for this; but even that will not fill the shady side of Bond Street, or people Brooke's and White's, with the forms that have been. Still, it hath its charms. To the philosopher it presents a charming desert, full of subjects of contemplation, and within a shilling fare of that city which is always in season. To the *blasé* man of pleasure, tired of that eternal grousing, and sick of the names of Lancaster and Purday, it is a retirement as noiseless as Père la Chaise, and much more suggestive of eternal quiet. Every house in the aristocratic Faubourg looks like a tenantless tomb—a pyramid of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The water-carts are at Margate, the rates and taxes are at Brighton, and our creditors are off to the Highlands. Alcibiades, Julius Cæsar, or Sheridan might walk the street with impunity. Even Solomon himself forgets to put his little writ or threat into execution.

There was a time when mohawks were alive: not so very long ago neither: when peaceful citizens, like old Brabantio, were roused from their slumbers by a strange knocking; when policemen's heads went starring it, and bells, door-knockers, scrapers, and watchmen's rattles furnished half the bachelor's room in London. An attempt was even made upon the golden emblem of the Brasenose College Gates; but unsuccessfully. No more, however, are the echoes of the paving-stones waked to the cry of "Watch"—as if any one could do aught else—and the ghost of Sir Richard Birnie sleeps peacefully in its shroud.

It did not take long for Crackenthorpe and his friend to see what there was to be seen at the theatres. The legitimate drama was on its wane. Fechter had not appeared, and Charles Kean had not yet murdered the nephew and uncle together. There was, of course, a sensation drama at the Adelphi, founded on the "Newgate Calendar," and one of the French immoralities, to be seen somewhere or other. Sadler's Wells, though I have not an idea where that is, was open; and the Surrey was not yet being whitewashed, nor its manager: still that does not last for ever; and after a

week's quiet dining, in a club-room all to themselves, with half a dozen waiters, and the run of the old novels and sofas in the drawing-room, they were proposing to return, preparatory to the doings at Pumpington. Bobby was still without his hundred pounds; and as the old gentleman was in town, dancing attendance upon the Secretary of Ireland, in the hope of getting something, he did not like to let the opportunity slip. One dinner—purely a business dinner, and not one of pleasure, Munster observed—and then he should be ready to depart. Three or four more days were wasted in inspecting a dealer's yard or two, without results; and then the day was fixed—in fact, the very day of the ball.

"When is it to be, Bobby? We must be off to-morrow."

"To-night, Tom; this very evening. I've nailed the old gentleman; and if he cuts up well, I shall go and buy that bay mare of old Grit. She'll carry me next season." And away went Mr. Munster.

Tom was condemned to a silent dinner, having played the rounds on the only Guardsman left at the Tower, one Treasury clerk, and the junior partner in a banking-house; all of whom were contemplating suicide the same evening, from the absence of their several late excitements. About twelve o'clock he was debating in his own mind the propriety of shutting up his novel and allowing the porter to go to bed, when he was interrupted by a note from Munster, to come to his rescue in the Giltspur Street Compter.

*Rubens* *referens*, but there he was. Like the Irish gentleman at Donnybrook Fair, or in the English House of Commons, it was not in the power of Robert Munster to leave London without a row of some kind. He had this time not descended to any of the ordinary methods of fashionable amusement. The case is a simple one; and the reader may probably search Holinshed's Chronicles in vain for a parallel. When Bobby appeared at his father's table in Russell Square, he was submitted to a severe disappointment, as his father had been before him, in Connemara, by the appointment of Sir Zachary Budget to an Indian judgeship. To his more matured taste, moreover, his father's cookery was very bad; and if the cellars were let furnished with the house, the choice samples had certainly been removed. Altogether, things were not calculated to promote peace and goodwill towards man.

"Money, Robert!" said the old gentleman; "rint, indeed! And how the devil do you expect the farm buildings are to be kept up, if you are to eat up the proceeds? No, no, sir; you must go into less expensive quarters than Pumpington, and in time you will do well enough."

"Certainly, sir, if you wish it," said the penitent Bob: "I've already made arrangements for living in a small village, with a

view to economy ; but, in the meantime, a hundred or two would be of great service, if——”

“If I and your brothers and sisters would go and live in a small village, too. Bedad, sir,”—and the old gentleman got quite Irish, which at other times he was not,—“Bedad, sir, you’re a profligate spendthrift.”

“I beg your pardon, sir ; but I have really not troubled you to pay, if I have a little exceeded.”

“Not troubled me, Robert ? I’ll not submit to be spoken to in that way,” rejoined Munster, senior, who saw an honourable termination to the interview ; “leave the room, sir ; you’re always at it !” And with a violence, half real and half feigned, the old man banged the door after him as he went out.

There remained but one course for Bobby, who smarted under the manifest injustice—to retire with a good grace, and trust to the tender mercies of Mr. Moss once more. “Upon my soul this is too bad,” said he, as he seized his hat from the hall table, and rushed down the door-steps, repeating aloud to himself, “Always at it ! that is a joke ; why, I haven’t seen him this nine months—always at it, indeed !” At this untoward moment, a most respectable Whitechapel leather-seller happened to be coming along the square, evidently bent upon catching the last Gray’s Inn Lane omnibus ; and right into Bobby he ran.

“I beg you ten thousand pardons,” said Hides ; “I’m sure I didn’t go to do it. I really didn’t see.”

“Confound you, sir, *you’re always doing it !*” roared Munster ; “and if you can’t see, you can feel, I suppose ?” which polite inquiry he accompanied with so vigorous a left-hander, that the leather-seller measured his stoutness on the *trottoir*. Policeman X had at that moment emerged from the area steps of a neighbouring house, after a valiant onslaught on beer, cold mutton, and hot pickles, with a very fair tap of Vauxhall gin and water, in the absence of the family at the sea-side, and was on his beat to meet his inspector, who as suddenly emerged from the opposite corner : of course he was bent upon doing his duty. Bobby was taken red-handed ; and as neither money nor persuasion was of any use, and they were determined to make what they called an example of the first of the privileged classes who was caught, he was marched off to the station, the charge taken, and Bobby locked up in durance vile. It was first necessary to catch a householder ; a very rare article. In the present case it cost a sovereign ; and perhaps, when the lateness of the hour and the special service required were considered, the respectable lady in bombazin and a coal-scuttle bonnet, who supplied that place by the complaisance of a night-porter or messenger, was cheap at the money. This little arrangement had just been completed, when Tom Cracken-



thorpe drove up in a cab; and he and the delinquent were enabled to return to the West-end together.

"This is rather a bore; eleven a.m. at the police-office, and eleven p.m. at the Pumpington Rooms. Suppose he insists upon locking you up for a week, Bob?"

"Oh! come, none of your playful suggestions."

"Well, it's just possible: the last time the Marquis was caught, old Hall vowed he would, the very next opportunity."

"By Jove, that wouldn't do at all: now let's have some gin and soda, and go to bed."

Eleven a.m. came on the eventful morning of the Pumpington ball; and with it Mr. Hall and his myrmidons. Bobby had not forfeited his bail, and Crackenthorpe attended to watch the proceedings. They were short and decisive.

"The next case. Come be quick," said Mr. Hall, who was perspiring from head to foot, having just ordered a juvenile two dozen for illegal gambling—"the next case. Who's this?"

"Charles Johnson, your worship. Assault at ten o'clock last night; gave his residence 379, Buckingham Street, Strand."

"Why, there aren't more than thirty houses in the street."

"No, your honour."

Here the policeman entered into the details of the charge, which were fully substantiated by John Hides, the aggrieved leather-seller.

"Charles Johnson," said his worship, looking straight at Bobby Munster, "what are you?"

"A poet," said Bob, after a moment's hesitation.

"What are your ostensible means of living?"

"Nothing at all. I have no means."

"Do you mean to say you have neither profession nor any property; excepting that of an author, or a poet, as you are pleased to call yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I had some property once; but it's all gone," answered Robert, with an assurance that surprised even Crackenthorpe.

"And what have you done with it?"

"Spent it all, sir."

"How?"

"In bribing the critics."

A roar of laughter greeted this naïve announcement; but a London beak was too sharp even for Bobby Munster's simplicity.

"Inspector, do you know anything about this charge, and the person calling himself Charles Johnson?"

"Can't say as I *rightly* knows him, sir; but I fear he's a real bad 'un, your worship."

"So I suspected," said his worship, who was getting too cunning.

"A very bad 'un indeed—a Markis in disguise, I think," rejoined Policeman X.

As this seemed to be, at present, the very worst description of character out, a shudder ran through the aristocratic assembly of thieves and drunkards, and the magistrate looked as if he would like to put on the black cap. Bobby himself began to despair of dancing at Pumpington that night, as this invention of the "Markis" had given a bad turn to affairs. At that moment a friend at court appeared. An unobserved policeman, who had once or twice been engaged in encounters with Bob and his friends, with that generosity which distinguishes conquerors towards tributary states and captives, ranged up alongside of his quondam prisoner, and whispered, "Say you was drunk."

"But I wasn't," said Bob.

"That don't matter! we all on us tells lies here."

So our friend, not to be out of the fashion, told one too.

The effect produced was electrical. A kind of sympathy appeared to extend itself at once towards the prisoner. Hides's eye looked suddenly less black; indeed, the announcement was calculated to open it. A little further conversation was carried on in a more favourable tone to the culprit, and it was finally announced to his worship, to the astonishment of Bob, by the friendly policeman, that the assault could be easily settled out of court, if his worship would inflict the usual fine.

"Charles Johnson, drunk and disorderly, fined 5s. What's the next case? Now, then, be as quick as you can."

We need hardly say that the 5s. was paid, and Hides was satisfied with a remunerative sovereign. The friendly policeman adjourned to a neighbouring public, with a strong party of sympathizing friends, where he drank a very fair share of the half-and-half which had been provided by Tom Crackenthorpe. Our heroes returned in a cab in time to pick up their luggage and catch the afternoon train to Pumpington.

"You mustn't look so like a Marquis the next time you're in trouble, Bob. It's quite clear the aristocracy is at a discount in the neighbourhood of Bow Street."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE BACHELORS' BALL.

AFTER the morning's amusement before Mr. Hall, it was not surprising that the prospect of the journey to Pumpington should be uninteresting enough. It is true that Tom Crackenthorpe employed himself in some sombre reflections on the coming ball—as to its success, and the anticipation of enjoyment peculiar to that sort of diversion. He had his misgivings as to his own capabilities as an *Amphitryon*, and certainly as to the eligibility of this species of hospitality. He was no bad hand at the top of a roystering dinner-table, especially where fox-hunting was likely to be “the toast” of the evening; he had presided in earlier life as president of “The Jolly Dragons;” he had been at Oxford the Most Noble Grand of the celebrated order of Odd Fellows; and had faced a portentous sucking pig and plum sauce at a harvest home, with considerable effect. But it was a totally different thing to do the honours of a Pumpington ball-room: to bow to Lady Washpot, to receive the astounding beauty of the Parade in its evening costume, to talk military with old Bulrush, borough politics with the Mayor, female accomplishments with Mrs. Jones, metaphysics with Miss Biddy Racoon, Scotch agriculture with Dingle Bogie, hunting with everybody, and to flirt at the same time with every young woman who thought the master of the ceremonies, for the time being, fair game. It must be confessed that he got into the train at 4 p.m. with some misgivings. Bobby Munster's were of a different kind. He was not the sort of gentleman to make himself unhappy for other people—whether the guests enjoyed themselves or not, was to him a matter of perfect indifference. He was quite certain to dance to his own satisfaction with half a dozen young women who were always amusing enough—either in their peculiarities or in their admiration for himself; and the only thing which at all compromised his enjoyment was his failure upon his governor's pocket. He regarded this in a very serious-light; and the absence of old Grit's mare from the horse-boxes behind was not the most serious of its consequences; it took full twenty miles of the journey to reconcile him to the fact that something or other must be done to raise the wind. About this period of the journey, however, he looked up from a brown study, whose results had been only monosyllables as yet, and beheld before him the very ugliest young man it had ever been his happiness to meet.

The individual in question ought to have been favoured by Fortune; he was not so by Nature. He had a comfortable, well-satisfied look, however, which goes a great way; his hair, of the thick, badly-got hay fashion and colour, could scarcely be said to be combed, but rather forked, low down on his forehead. His eyes were large, but not lustrous, of the gooseberry order; his nose was broken and flat in the middle, and the end of it rather on one side; his whiskers met in what is commonly known as a Newgate fringe, and about five or six days' growth of moustache did not add to the beauty of a mouth which counterbalanced his nose by smiling on the wrong side. Nature seemed to have been setting right what she felt she had already set wrong. His dress was flash in the extreme; rings adorned his ungloved hands in considerable profusion and confusion, from a "seal ring of his grandfather's" to a sparkling emerald, the badge of the island whence he manifestly derived his origin and growth. Several locketts, supposed to contain hair and portraits of his *inamorate*, dangled conspicuously from his watch-chain, and a whole host of gridirons, ballet-dancers, warming-pans, mariners' compasses, and bassinets kept them company. Had he not looked inexpressibly soft, he might have been a prize-fighter on Sunday out for an excursion-train holiday.

No sooner did he perceive Bobby Munster to have shaken the blue devils from him, "like dew drops from the lion's mane," than he entered upon a conversation, cheerful enough, and not uninteresting to his companions.

"You'll not object to a little smoke, I preshume, gentlemen," said he; at the same time drawing out a black-looking pipe, which lay dormant in a breast-pocket, and flavoured the whole of his left side, inside and out, one might have imagined. Neither Crackenthorpe nor Munster could well object, upon principle; and, seeing the black pipe well alight, had recourse to one of the large regalias.

"It's to the Spa you'll be going?" said he, after he had got the pipe well under weigh. "Faith, it's a charming place, is Pumpington."

Both of our friends assented, and wondered they had never seen the gentleman in that favoured place before.

"Bedad, it's a long time—anyhow three or four years—since I was in the town. I wouldn't be going now, but there's a great ball to-night, and I couldn't get off anyhow. Maybe you'll know Crackenthorpe?"

Bobby thought he'd seen him.

"Capital fellow, bedad, I'm told: does the thing well. Fine property, and a great domain in the West Injies—I'd be glad to have a slice of it."

"He has a good property, I believe," said the unabashed Bobby; whilst Crackenthorpe buried himself deeper in his book than ever. "Then you know the people at Pumpington well, I suppose?"

"Would I know my own mother if I was to see her?—more, by token, she's dead since I was an infant. Don't I know everybody in the place? There's the Joneses and the Bulrushes, them's a proud lot: and the Grizzels, and ould Lawyer Sparkes—Sharks I used to call him; and the Bogie, and the O'Toole—he's the man that can cross a counthry—divil a sowl betther in Pumpington."

"Perhaps you are going to the ball with Sir MacShanus to-night?" said Bobby encouragingly, and wondering what revelations were coming.

"Indeed and I am; it's the young ladies that's going, too."

"Yes; the room will be pretty full. Everybody will be there."

"Will it be a good supper? I like a supper. It's impossible to dance without champagne. I suppose Crackenthorpe will be for marrying one of them Bulrushes: they tell me he's mighty thick there."

"Well; I should say not!" said Bobby, who was just in time to prevent Tom from stopping him, by honestly introducing himself. The opportunity was, however, lost by the rejoinder:

"Bedad, sir, he must marry—they'll be taking him by storm, There's no rest but the grave for the like of him among the women. Don't I know them?"

"You seem to have had great experience." Tom was still buried in the *N.S.M.*

"Expriance! you may say that! I'm eight-and-twenty, and they proposed to me eight times in two seasons. It's the mothers puts 'em up to it."

"It seems marvellous that you should have escaped."

"Escaped! It was a marvellous escape! What, you heard of it, did ye? Faith, the first ball went clane through me hat, and the second took away the end of me neckcloth. It was a delicate affair, that; but, mum, you know, where a lady's concerned. It's a bad thing to be playing the fool in that way. But there's a Mr. Munster, I'm told, gives the entertainment with Mr. Crackenthorpe. He's a most extraordinary fellow, that; a counthry-man of my own, partly, I believe; and how he manages without a shilling!"

"Pardon me," said Tom, thinking that affairs were arriving at a crisis—pardon me: I must not allow you to remain any longer in ignorance that this is Mr. Munster, and I—well, I'm Mr. Crackenthorpe."

"Oh! by the piper that played before Moses, I've put my foot

in it!" said the very cheerful but unguarded Irishman, "If I've said anything, now—but you'll forgive me?"

"We owe you the apology for not at first telling you, and we shall be very happy to see you this evening."

"Yes," said Munster; "and as you seem to have a taste for champagne ——"

"As you're sthrong, be merciful, Mr. Munster; I'll be charmed to accept your kind invitation."

"And I think we can promise you an interview with most of your former friends; there are still some of the mothers left at Pumpington, whose attentions you found so difficult to escape from."

"Oh, Mr. Munster!" said the Irishman, with a conscious leer and deprecatory smile; "you've looked upon such matters with considerable discernment, and you will be glad to know that the race is not extinct." And here, by way of finishing the conversation gracefully, Bob produced "*L'Homme à l'Oreille cassée*," and began to read. The Irishman blew his cloud in silence, and pondered on his last narrow escape.

At length they reached Pumpington: the first thing was to see that the arrangements had been satisfactorily carried out in their absence; and the next to have their dinner, which was ordered at seven o'clock. Pre-occupation made dinner not altogether a form, but nearly so, with Crackenthorpe. Before dressing he read a letter from his mother, which, by prescriptive right as an author, I present to the reader, however a breach of confidence under ordinary circumstances. It ran thus:—

"Torquay, August 25th.

"MY DEAR TOM—Thank you very much for your letter. I am sorry I cannot be with you on the 29th; but my health, as you know, does not admit of such constant moving. Having reached this place from Paris, I must stay here till the contrast between the two has done me good. The stupidest place I ever was in—the most lovely country, and the very vilest bonnets. The crinolines are worn here much too large; and the place is full of jackasses, bathing-women, and physicians. I am so charmed to hear of you taking a country-house; I shall come to take care of it for you myself. Pray don't let those Pumpington women marry you: as to your friend, Mr. Munster, it might do him good, and would certainly serve him right. Mind you have your hair cut properly. If young men only knew the importance of these little things. And I hope you always go to church on Sundays: it gives a good tone, and of late years has been quite the thing to do. The embassy service in Paris is very well attended, at least in the morning; besides you know it is a duty. That's one reason why I like your

friend Bingham; I think you should cultivate his acquaintance, he is always in good society; but I don't know about the women. You ought to make a very good match, for you know you will have a very fine income. Do not fail to let me know all about the ball, and believe me,

"My dearest boy, your affectionate mother,

"LUCY CRACKENTHORPE."

"P.S.—Let me know whether you think that new colour, magenta, the emperor's colour, is becoming to fair women. You used to be a bit of an artist, and had an eye for colour especially."

So much for Mrs. Crackenthorpe, thought Tom, as he folded up the letter. She'll be a little inconvenienced at Lushenham when we get there; however, she's an excellent woman, and I love her dearly, so she shall do as she likes. As these thoughts passed through the brain of our friend, he gave a finishing touch to his back-hair, looked once more in his glass, and slipped into a very comfortable garment called a coat, but which our grandfathers would have called a dressing-gown. On his way downstairs he met Bobby Munster, with Halston and Butterson, whom he was enlivening with an account of the police-office, and an explanation of the report. At the foot of the stairs stood Lord Cropperton, in travelling costume, and desiring his servant, in the confusion, to ascertain which was his room. Then the bell rang, and a furious cannonade of post-horses, imperials, and a lady's-maid with a parrot, announced an arrival, and Crackenthorpe thought it about time to go into the rooms. In the supper-room he found a servant, who condescended to explain the time his master would like the supper served, and said he had made it early rather, "as people didn't eat quite so much soon after dinner." He treated Tom *de haut en bas* until he found out who he was, when he condescended to submit to his orders, and put the supper back an hour or two. Having returned, after making what he thought admirable arrangements for everybody's feeding, he got back into the ball-room, where the company was beginning to arrive. The Joneses came early, sorely against the parents' desire. Mrs. Jones thought it fashionable to be late; Mr. Jones was in no hurry to leave a bottle of Sparkes's port. Clara knew better; she knew Crackenthorpe must be there, and "first come, first served." She looked for a dance in her new sky-blue silk with the pink rosettes. She'd have spoilt anything in the world—an offer itself—by trying to hold it out. The Sparkeses were not yet come, but Miss Biddy Raccoon was there, with the Irish Yahoo, the railway acquaintance, who would have made the most of it had not Crackenthorpe stopped him, assuring

him that he felt no offence, and was very glad to see him. Sir MacShanus O'Toole of course had brought "his darters," and wished to introduce his young friend Mr. Dermot Macgillcuddy, cousin of Macgillicuddy, of the Reeks. Mr. Crackenthorpe had had the pleasure of meeting him before. Then came a visible addition to the rapidly assembling company—the Bulrushes had arrived: a large and important party. A rustle of the most magnificent crinolines amongst the young women, and a strong detachment of many-coloured turbans, announced the Mayor, Mrs. Mayoress and family, several members of the Corporation of Pumpington, and the several corporations of the members for Pumpington, both of whom appeared upon this occasion. Mr. Crackenthorpe was a subscriber to the hounds too, and the M.F.H.—a short, vulgar sort of man, a semi-gentleman, who got his living out of them, and showed excellent sport, performing all the dirty offices himself—brought his *lady*, as she was called, in distinction to the rest of the women, who were wives. By the time the Misses Sparkeses had settled their wreaths and hooked up Fanny Grizzell's dress, which was getting too small for her, and had given a little since dinner in different places, it seemed time to begin. Hunting-men at Pumpington are tremendous fellows to dance, and have quite as much of the bear as of the jackass about them. Tom Crackenthorpe settled himself down for a regular night of it, and commenced operations at once with Plumper's wife, M.P. for the borough. Munster suited his taste, and selected Clara Jones. She really was a very pretty girl, and had done her best to return as equally as possible the great amount of love that had been made to her; Bobby had the greatest share. Amelia Sparkes fell to the lot of Jack Halston; and Marian Bulrush, by some eccentric means, found herself in the full enjoyment of the richest brogue she had as yet heard. The shock-headed Irishman was flirting and dancing with equal vigour. A quadrille—the first quadrille, even at Pumpington, is always respectable; neither men nor women feel quite at home with their tongues. Fresh introductions want thawing and old ones renewing; but after that, with such materials for raising the caloric as are to be found at the Spa, an iceberg would melt in a quarter of an hour. Maidens fair and forty; charming widows from the East, all jewels and jointure; portionless girls, in an atmosphere of flounces, *bouquet du roi*, sandal-wood, and violets; match-making mammas, of a natural talent and acquired experience, which pokes the fire and then puts up the guard; liverless bachelors, all cayenne pepper, turtle, and Peruvian cyanokaita; middle-aged dandies, retired rakes, and rollicking Irishmen, who were ready at a moment's notice to run away with anybody who could pay for the posters



—not the four-posters—or help any brother in distress to do the same. Before long the room was a blaze of light gauze, back-hair, dust, and amazement; the music thundered away, the Irishman howled, the revellers perspired; even Lord Cropperton and Ned Bingham caught the infection, and the universal world seemed turned upside down. Below the shindy was equally *prononcé*, and the occasion more attractive. Claret-cup, sherry-negus, mulled-port, and gin-punch were refreshing the weary or strengthening the timid; and along the charming little seats and ottomans in the passages and byways vows were exchanged, never to be broken—till next week. Plaintive accents of unconditional acceptances were heard; suggestions to “call on papa” were negatived; ladders of ropes, post-chaises and four, “my degree,” “got my step,” “uncle’s death,” “dear mamma, what will she say?” with “oh! Captain Smith, they are coming this way!” produced a Babel of whispers which might have been appreciated in the gallery of St. Paul’s. Amongst these heroes, we regret to say, figured Mr. Munster. He was vowing eternal fidelity to Clara Jones, who was wondering where dear mamma was gone, not being anxious to commit herself until she had heard the result of another search in Doctors’ Commons, and yet tempted strongly by the melodramatic appeals of the amorous Bob to trust herself to the care of that impulsive young man. They were, however, aroused from their blissful dream by the announcement of supper, and it is but justice to say that most of the ladies and gentlemen were so accustomed to the evening’s amusement and its results that scarcely any diminution of appetite appeared among them. We must give Tom the credit he deserved upon this occasion, by assuring the reader that, though he may have been sorely tempted, he scrupulously abstained, in his character as host, from any declaration of love to his guests. He had ascertained from Lawyer Sparkes that Lushenham had become his for a term of years, and he was satisfied with making himself as agreeable as possible, short of a proposal of marriage, to Amelia or Jemima.

“Then he must pay the bill at last,” said the lawyer to a magnificent dame in *moiré-antique* and point-lace lappets, who was no other than his own wife.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## THE CATASTROPHE.

WHILST affairs were going thus swimmingly in the ball and supper rooms, there was a small conspiracy hatching in a back room which was destined to create a sensation later in the evening, or, rather, later in the morning of the coming day. At the back of the principal rooms, now surrendered to the votaries of Terpsichore, was one which seemed rather to belong to the too ardent worshippers of Bacchus. It was small, snug, and redolent of old clothes upon ordinary occasions, being used to hang up cloaks, bonnets, damp umbrellas, goloshes, and patent india-rubber utensils, whether portable baths, driving capes, or gig aprons. At the present time it was converted into a much pleasanter and healthier atmosphere by the admission of sundry barrels of oysters, foaming tankards of bottled porter, warm tumblers of gin and water, and a bowl of reeking punch, which some half dozen men had been, and still were, discussing, with the ordinary sporting topics of the day. I am bound to admit that both Pumpington and Lushenham partake very strongly of the sporting element. Men of feeling will detect the sentimental in Clara Jones or Amelia Sparkes; men of action, the practical in Lawyer Sparkes and Bobby Munster; men of fashion, the aristocratic in a live earl and the Hon. Biddy Racoon; but Tom Crackenthorpe is a sportsman, and we are not anxious to divest our characters of that peculiar element which modern writers of extraordinary felicity of expression have called their *spécialité*. Some half dozen men, who—with a perversity of taste quite incomprehensible, excepting that opening an oyster is very much easier to some people than opening a conversation—had left the society of charming women and iced champagne for their own finger-spoiling and indigestible occupation, were enjoying themselves thoroughly in their own way in this little back parlour. They had it all to themselves, and their anecdotes of dogs, horses, and guns, gave them the liveliest satisfaction. It is but justice to say that amongst old Joe Millers, which flourished under a new dynasty of names, some original and racy anecdotes appeared; and Jack Halston's piebald pony, and Tom Cracks's ride home with the drunken postboy, had to be repeated more than once during the evening, as an empty barrel rolled out of the room and a full one took its place.

"Chawm-ing gurl, that little Bingham; rides, too, splendid,'pon my soul," said a hairy sub, sticking an oyster-knife at the same

time into his finger, and dropping it immediately. "Cracks seems sweet on the chesnut filly, eh?"

"Oh! nonsense; he's provided for long ago; the General couldn't afford to let him go," said young Naylor in reply, plunging afresh into the barrel, with his mouth full of new bread and butter; "he's always there; to my certain knowledge, he dined there three times the week before last, and I saw Maww Anne widing his woan mare the day before yesterday."

"Well, I don't see why a fellow shouldn't marry, if he likes," said Jack Halston. "What can it signify whose horse she rides, if she don't wear the breeches?"

"Talking of horses, Jack, how 's Piebald? Nice pony—very—dances, don't he?"

"Capitally. And walks up and down stairs like a human; better than you plungers. I'll lay a hundred he walks into the ball-room and down again before you, if you'll put on your sword," rejoined Jack Halston.

"Aw-aw-aw!" roared the Plunger, stroking his moustache, and diving into the porter. "Like to see him; owners up, eh, Jack?"

"Oh! that's immaterial. Will you lay me a hundred he don't do it now?"

At this juncture the door opened, and in came Bob Munster with his railroad acquaintance, Mr. Macgillycuddy—what a name it is to write! The Irishman was considerably the better for his supper. It was quite clear that he had not stuck to the water-jug; and he looked more frightfully ugly than ever. He was quite at home, and bent upon distinguishing himself in some manner.

"What's the bet?" said Munster; and the information was imparted in a Babel-like confusion of tongues.

"Bless me life, man! it's the aisiest thing in the world. My grandfather of the Reeks had a pony that slept in the attics; and what's more, he died in 'em like a Christian. The great fool of a servant put on a straw mattress, and he ate it all, and it gave him the cholic. I'll back the pony; they're clever animals, is ponies."

"You remember Joe Smith, the Colonel of the Prince's Buffers? Well, he had a pony which walked clean over the turnpike gate, step by step; and what's more, he took the buggy with him. It was a very light one, you know," said Mr. Munster, who was wondering how far he might venture without having an oyster-knife stuck into him, or being shot through the body in the morning.

"Come, come, Bobby, that's too good. But you know Tom Cosgrave? He had a pony that went under a gate, carriage and all, and it only knocked his hat off."

At this sally there was another roar.

"Bedad, now, you're joking!" expostulated the Irishman.

"Not a bit of it. No more than yourself. If you don't believe, *you can see the gate to-morrow*—it's on the road to Lush-enham."

Such a proof being considered by all present as highly satisfactory, nothing more could be urged against the veracity of the *raconteur*; and the cornet, having expressed his determination to back himself for a hundred to get up and into the ball-room as far as the first chandelier, and back again and down stairs, sword and all, before the piebald pony, he at a walk and the pony at any pace he pleased, it only remained to take him up and find a rider. The most difficult thing, the finding the money, was not adverted to. The bet included the necessity of the performance during the evening.

"My servant is in the supper-room," said Jack Halston; "send him here, waiter." He had put his head into the room, and withdrawn it under the pressure of oyster shells. "Fetch up the circus pony." The man stared at his master, as well he might. "Never mind about dressing him over. Be back in a quarter of an hour, saddled and bridled, and let us know."

The interim was employed in finding a rider. As the Irishman had protested in favour of the pony, it was agreed, on all sides, that he was the most eligible pilot. He was not bashful, and readily gave way to the solicitations of his friends. Before the arrival of his mount he had backed himself for five-and-twenty pounds, and in another ten minutes was in the saddle prepared for his ride.

The dragoon would willingly have withdrawn, but Jack Halston was not a man to be off when he contemplated winning. It was not by any means the first hundred he had won in a similar manner. The Irishman, however, was no sooner mounted, than a little delicacy presented itself—the ladies. What would the ladies say? "Lord love you, my dear fellow, the ladies here are getting quite used to it: they rather like it; that pony nearly lives on the stairs." Then if that was the case, it wasn't worth while sacrificing five-and-twenty pounds to a sentiment which would not be appreciated.

Upstairs the fun was going fast and furious. Not the slightest idea existed of the treat that was in store for the enraptured youths of either sex, who were breathing soft nothings into one another's ears, or squeezing about in a convenient crowd to the trombone and clarinet, which bellowed forth "The First-love" waltz. Every man to his taste. And whilst Mr. Crackenthorpe was making people happy with the elegances of social life, his coadjutor Mr. Munster was preparing his *divertissements* below.

In the midst of a most uproarious gallopade, in which many twinkling feet and tongues were giving effect to the music, an awful gong was heard. The folding-doors of the drawing-room suddenly opened, and on the stairs approaching the ball-room was seen a very edifying spectacle. The whole house was lighted of course with gas, and gave effect from its brilliancy to the group below. Up two or three steps at a time struggled the gallant piebald, under the load of the unsteady Irishman, floundering about on his hind legs, but managing to pull himself along to the infinite delight of the tipsy rider, and to the wonder and confusion of the dancers. The cornet of dragoons held on manfully, two steps at a time; but confined to a walk, and encumbered by his sword, which, according to agreement, was to dangle behind him, was considerably outpaced by the circus pony. The Irishman shouted at the top of his voice—the sabre clattered behind him—and the pony was about to enter the *salon*, to the delight of some, the wonder of all, and the inconvenience of a few, who had scarcely yet accustomed themselves to the fashionable eccentricities of the Pumpington gaities, when, without the slightest warning, the gas shot up in a brilliant jet, and then left the horseman, the dragoon, their supporters, and the spectators in impenetrable darkness. Every light in that part of the establishment was simply gone, as effectually as if the whole scene had at once been plunged into the infernal regions. The Irishman yelled—the dragoon halted and swore—Jack Halston and his crew shouted with laughter; Crackenthorpe, who was rushing to seize the pony and throw the rider down stairs head foremost, was arrested midway in his career—the women shrieked; and the pony, having suspended operations by so unexpected a termination, turned suddenly round and shot the unhappy Macgillicuddy, fortunately on the top of his head, straight into the ball-room. Now was the cornet's time to grope his way to the chandelier and return in the arms of victory; but the envious goddess, who holds the scales and presides over fair play, brought to bear upon the cornet's handsome nose the fist of an irate gentleman, who was expressing his disgust in a somewhat vigorous manner, and spoilt his beauty. Fearful of a second accident, the gallant dragoon turned tail and disappeared.

When once more the gas came to life, the scene was curious to an uninterested observer. Young ladies not exactly in hysterics—had taken refuge in curious places; gentlemen had their arms full. In front of it all was our Hibernian friend, being led away passively, between a couple of recently made acquaintances, with two black eyes and his nose bleeding; he was also short of a front tooth. The piebald was walking towards the bed-rooms, having picked up some scarves and a good quantity of

lace in the confusion. The more orderly of the company returned to their partners ; only six ladies fainted, and were brought to by pressing attention to their wants ; only six more left the room ; the small oyster-room got fuller than ever ; bets were declared off ; the cornet never showed again at Pumpington ; and the Irishman was not heard of until three seasons afterwards, when he married Miss Biddy Racoon. Dancing and a second supper were kept up with much spirit till five in the morning ; and everybody went home, to get up with a headache or a heartache, and many with both. One little incident deserves to be mentioned, with which we may take leave of Pumpington, and carry our readers to other scenes more congenial to the pursuits of Tom Crackenthorpe and his friends.

Bobby Munster remembered, the day after, that he had ventured upon a rather strong expression of affection to Clara Jones, and was not quite certain how far that young lady might consider him, as well as herself, committed, if it suited her purpose. His mind was scarcely made up by five o'clock p.m. ; so he strolled out to the Parade, on his way to look after his domestic interests. He was very proud of having at last made a decided conquest ; of that there could be no doubt. He met the gossiping Mrs. Markby and her yellow daughter at the corner ; the latter of whom informed him that poor dear Clara had disappeared from the ball in company with Mr. Halston, and that the family was in convulsions, as she had not been heard of since. " But, dear me, Mr. Munster, what are such feathers and furbelows likely to come to ? " I need scarcely suggest that Miss Markby's style was decidedly inelaborate. No further light was ever thrown upon the sudden darkness of the ball-room. Everybody, except Mr. Munster, heartily abused the clerk of the gas-works.



## CHAPTER X.

### AFTER THE BALL.

WHILE Tom Crackenthorpe had been enjoying himself and entertaining his friends, negotiations had been going on for the house at Lushenham swimmingly. When there is no particular object in delay, *i. e.*, when the lawyer's bill will not be lengthened by procrastination, nor the landlord be benefited by keeping out

the tenant, you may be pretty sure of having your business done. If, on the contrary, delay involves more six-and-eightpenny visits or three-and-fourpenny letters, or if you happen to be a nervous subject, and very anxious to get in by a certain day, and would sacrifice a ten-pound note for the sake of comfort, the whole staff becomes affected with moral paralysis: the bricklayers rest on their steps, and the carpenters suspend the operations of their plummets and lines, until the unfortunate hitch, that no fellow could have foreseen, is set right. Sometimes, if you are very anxious indeed, it cannot be set right at all without new agreements, or an additional 500*l.*, or some moderate sum of that kind, which is nicely calculated as an additional sacrifice worthy of the expenses already incurred. In the present case nothing of the sort happened. Old Sparkes behaved with exemplary honesty, for he felt there was nothing more to get, as Crackenthorpe was away; and he had a shrewd suspicion that letters would not be answered.

Having visited Lushenham once more, the day after the ball—having indulged in Farmer Simcox's tap to a moderate extent, given some orders about the loose boxes outside, as well as inside, and very particular directions for the erection of a leaping-bar in the field at the back of the house, Tom took the train to London. He was unaccompanied by Mr. Robert Munster, that gentleman being employed in swallowing his violent grief for the loss of his dear Clara, soothing his ruffled vanity, and endeavouring to provide himself with a gun at the longest possible credit, for the coming campaign against the partridges. An advertisement of a rather curious character had attracted Crackenthorpe's attention. It was on the subject of partridge-shooting: "To be let, for one month only, from the first of September, 2,000 acres of excellent shooting," &c., &c., &c. He had been so successful on his first introduction to an advertisement, that he felt bound to stand by them for the rest of his life. This promised everything: lots of birds, first-rate keeper, picturesque comfortably-furnished cottage, two packs of hounds (very useful, in September, before breakfast), trout-stream, within reach of a country town, and an able practitioner. This latter was of inestimable value. To Tom Crackenthorpe it held out one advantage that was not mentioned by the advertiser. It was not very far from some shooting which had been taken by Lord Cropperton and Ned Bingham; and though not wary, he was quite sensible enough to know that he might as well have something or somebody to fall back upon, in the case of disappointment.

The applicant was directed for particulars to Messrs. Cutpurse and Co., solicitors, 103, Pluckham Court, High Holborn, where an interview with the principal might be obtained, if necessary.

This looked honest. And no sooner was Mr. Thomas Cracken-thorpe shot out of the train at Euston Square, than he mounted a Hansom Cab and wended his way to High Holborn. There was but one day to spare before the commencement of operations against the birds, and Cutpurse and Co. were on the look-out when the new client arrived.

"Jenkins," said Cutpurse, from an inner chamber.

"Yes sir," said Jenkins, a mouldy-looking young man, from the so-called office; at the same time putting in his head to see, as well as hear, what was the matter.

"I'm sure the young man now at the door, and looking for the number and the bell, is come about that shooting. Say Mr. Cutpurse is not at home, but there's somebody here to give every information."

"Yes, sir; but perhaps he isn't come about that business."

"Bless me, Jenkins, what a fool you are! Don't you see he's a sportsman? Look at his hat, and his pin, and his dog-skin gloves, and thick laced boots."

Mr. Cutpurse was a man of observation.

A pull at the bell decided the question as to the *where*, and a few minutes more as to the *what* he wanted.

"Gentleman wishes to see Mr. Cutpurse about the shooting in —shire," said Jenkins, handing in Tom's card, and followed immediately by Tom himself.

"Mr. Cutpurse?" said the gentleman, hesitating, not as to whether it would be desirable to deny his own identity, but whether a temporary absence or a more decided disappearance of the principal actor were the better. He soon made up his mind. "Pray take a seat, sir. I'm sorry to say Mr. Cutpurse left town yesterday—only yesterday. Gone abroad, sir; gone abroad, and left the business in our hands."

"Oh! I see," said Tom, who really saw Cutpurse, only he didn't know it—"I see; you are the agents for the proprietor. I understood that the principal could be seen."

"The principal! pre-e-cisely," said the man, absent in the spirit, but in Pluckham Court in the flesh. "As I said, he went abroad only yesterday. Most unfortunate! such excellent shooting, too!"

"What! gone with Mr. Cutpurse—gone together?"

"Pre-e-cisely." The fact is that Cutpurse himself had taken the shooting at a nominal rent, to let again. "He is with Mr. Cutpurse."

"And the shooting, you say, is very good?"

"Good! Bless me! indeed it is good. Of course, I can't say that I've seen it; but we live upon it here, I believe: partridges all day—every day; hares, rabbits, and all sorts of game."



"And who had the shooting last season? I suppose Mr. Cutpurse would refer me to him?"

"Sir Peregrine Fox has had it for two or three seasons. Here's his address, sir: you can write or call if you please."

Sir Peregrine was a middle-aged baronet, out at elbows, unscrupulous, and needy. He made the acquaintance of Mr. Cutpurse under circumstances which involved the renewal of various bills, and the intervention of some dark-complexioned foreign gentlemen, and the supposititious transfer of pictures, wines, tubs of tallow, and goose-feathered mattresses. Having obtained in ready money six hundred and seventy pounds for a note-of-hand value one thousand, he felt himself under deep obligation to Cutpurse, and was prepared at a moment's notice to give his shooting a character.

"Can one see it? Not above a couple of hours by rail, is it, from London?"

"About two hours." Consulting his watch at the same time, he added, "You could run down and see it, sir, in an hour from this time, and be back again in the evening if you wish it."

Tom thought it was feasible; he therefore asked what would be about the rent, which he thought rather high, seeing it was 1s. an acre per month, and whether it could be had for a longer period without much additional expense. Of course, all points were conceded, the material one appearing to be on its way to accomplishment, at least as far as Mr. Cutpurse's belief in his own intentions could guarantee them. Having committed himself to nothing, and believing all things—even his own identity—he bowed to Mr. Crackenthorpe; and, Mr. Jenkins retreating before him to the street-door, with "Mind the step," "In the dark, sir," and "Take care of your head as you go out," that gentleman found himself in the street.

"Jenkins, come here. Be off to the telegraph-office at once, and send down this to Tim Farbrace, gamekeeper, Fox-holes, Axall Station. Be as quick as you can. I doubt he won't go, but it's as well to be on the safe side."

Tim Farbrace was an idle vagabond, half poacher, half keeper—up to everything. As his getting a keeper's wages depended on the letting of the shooting, of course he was equally zealous and unprincipled as his master. Just now he was smoking his after-dinner pipe and drinking strong beer at the "Chequers," in rather a despondent state of mind at not having heard from Mr. Cutpurse lately. The last speculator had been frightened away by taking the wrong beat first and finding no birds. Tim had determined that that shouldn't happen next time; indeed, he proposed quite a new method, if he could but manage it. He was beginning his third pint, when old widow Dooley's son arrived from the

station with a telegraphic message for Farbrace. It was very concise: "Gent coming down: green. Cutpurse gone abroad." Fortunately Tim was in full possession of his faculties. So, upon receipt of this intelligence, he went first to the cottage. It was very cheerful-looking and well placed; so that, excepting for the holes in the roof, which let in the wet, and the chimneys, which all smoked, and the want of furniture, and the bad drainage, it was a very comfortable place. The first thing he did was to borrow a small sofa from a neighbouring cottage, and two easy-chairs from another friendly hand in the village; for, as everybody wanted a pigeon to pluck, they were all willing enough to assist in catching him. Having dressed out the place in these borrowed plumes, the next consideration was himself and the manor. He was aware that a day-labourer's smock was not quite the costume to give an air of sport to the thing; so calling at his cottage, he put on an old velveteen coat took from a drawer a whistle with a string and a strong dog-whip, put on some tight gaiters and ankle-jacks, and presented an appearance altogether delusive as regarded his real merits or occupation. Having diligently sought for his friend and brother chip, Mr. Thistledown, the keeper of the next beat to his own—Broadacres (also a few hundred acres in the market from season to season, and now taken by a fast young stockbroker)—he explained to him the nature of his position.

"Now, you know, Bill, this year you're got a sight o' birds, and we ain't got none—leastways on one side the manor. So don't you come round on our side o' the manor too early to-morrow morning, for I'm going to borrow most o' your birds. I shall go and drive over ourn into them further turnips, nearest the cottage, and take him over them as soon as he comes down, and leave yourn for an early walk to-morrow. He ain't beginning to shoot, for he ain't got the place yet."

So saying, away he strode towards the west side of the shooting, and was not very long before he had sent over a pretty fair complement on the barren side.

"There," said Tim, "I think I've kuk'd his guuse for un this time."

As Crackenthorpe was strolling along towards the station, whom should he fall upon, pursuing a very noiseless, philosophizing tenour of his way, about the top of Regent Street and Oxford Street, but Ned Bingham? He, too, was on his road to Lord Cropperton's manor, and only waiting till the train should start, which arrives about dinner-time. After the usual greetings had passed, he said—

"Do you know of a good dog for sale? I know it's late in the day; but I only just now made up my mind, and I must put up with what I can get."

"Why, where are you going to begin the season?" asked Bingham.

"Not above twenty miles from Cropperton's," said Cracks. On some place near Axall—that Sir Peregrine Fox used to have. In fact, I'm going to look at it to-night."

"Ah! it's a little late, isn't it?" said Bingham. "*Experto crede*: mind those fellows about shooting; they'll do you as sure as you're alive. But what *do* you want with a dog?"

"Why, to shoot to, to be sure."

"What! a pointer?" said Bingham.

"Yes!" said Crackenthorpe, with his eyes and mouth wide open. "What should it be for? Have a cigar?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!" roared Bingham. "Well, that's good! So, you're going to shoot with a dog? Lord bless you man! nobody shoots with a dog now. The keeper has his own retriever, very likely; if not, you must buy one. But pointers and setters—there's not such a thing left, excepting in some old-fashioned out-of-the-way places that one never goes to."

"Then what *do* they do? They must find the game."

"Walk 'em up. Lord! Cracks, what are you thinking about? I suppose you're not much of a hand at it?"

"Well, not much. You know I always liked hunting, and I didn't care much about the pigeons on Cowley Marsh—or being caught poaching at Abingdon. So that this is really my first season by myself; but I suppose there are lots of birds?"

"Oh, yes, there's plenty of birds in that country, as a rule; but all I say is, look out sharp; for they'll do you if they can. And that old Fox is as bad as Cutpurse himself, I suspect. It's a bad feature in the case, belonging to a lawyer to start with, and he gone abroad. By all means go down and look for yourself: and mind you go exactly the opposite way to the one he tries to persuade you. You'll come over and see us, old fellow, and have a day or two now and then?"

Cracks walked on towards the S.W. Terminus, and reached it in time to look about him. The conclusion of his research was that the whole world consisted of dogs, guns, and billycock hats; there was scarcely anything else to be seen there. He turned over Bingham's advice in his mind, wished he had brought Bobby Munster with him, and felt almost inclined to turn back. However, he had taken his ticket and his place, and determined not to be daunted by six or eight hours' inconvenience. What he did, and how he succeeded, deserves another chapter.

## CHAPTER XI.

## SOME SHOOTING

OUR hero was not long in following the telegram. Tim Farbrace and his mother, who acted as housekeeper, had just managed to arrange the last chair, and had put the "Sportsman's Directory," two odd volumes of the "Old Sporting Review," and the "Life of John Mytton," by Nimrod, on the top of the Family Bible, when the white smoke of the engine was seen coming through the valley. It gave a comfortable two hours for a walk over one side of the manor, and Tim had taken care that that should do for the afternoon's beat; the to-morrow, like a good Christian, he left to take care of itself, with a strong suspicion, however, that he could give it a helping hand with considerable more effect than Providence. By the time his meditation had reached this point, the train had reached the Axall Station, and in a few minutes more he was confronted with his intended victim.

"Ain't got ne'er a dog, sir?" said he; "sorry for it, as I didn't know as you was a-coming. But, excuse me, sir, and I'll go and fetch old Nell; or p'raps we can take it on our road."

He then began to describe the boundaries of the manor, from the cottage garden, whence certain points were visible; told how they shot four brace in them turnips, six in they swedes, and never see such a lot in his life as there was in that standing barley. Standing barley was a sort of Canaan to Crackenthorpe, who, his capacity being limited, regarded a fifteen yards' rise as somewhat wild. He nodded his head, however, not unmindful of Ned Bingham, and prepared for a start.

We left Munster deploring his hurt vanity, and lost love at Pumpington. No sooner had he ascertained that his dear Clara was gone, than he turned his attention to some more profitable investment of his time than love-making. But as nothing can be done in this world without money—at least pocket-money, which even men who live upon nothing per annum are bound to have—Bobby turned his first thoughts to that important subject. London is always connected with this subject, and very properly. One seems, amidst so much wealth, to be positively pelted with the vile dross, and like abuse, some of it is sure to stick. That must be the general idea; for whenever a poor devil, out at elbows, determines upon a vigorous effort to recruit exhausted resources, he always feels compelled to run up to town; and, once in town, there is but one quarter, and that's the City. So thought

Bobby. But in turning over in his mind the numberless persons to whom he had at times been professionally indebted, he remembered one Cutpurse and Co. It is but honest to say that he did not believe in the Co. Cutpurse alone he recognised, and a visit to High Holborn might save him a longer walk.

The negotiations were not of a formidable character to one accustomed to the business. To the neophyte, fifty pounds out of five hundred for six months represents simply twenty per cent. and therefore the seventy-five pounds which Bobby Munster consented to relinquish represents just thirty per cent. It was very moderate, considering that the security was nearly personal, with a rather questionable post-obit on the family estate. There was a curious condition attached, less vulgar than wine, bottles, pictures, or raw hides; it was a little shooting at a hundred pounds, which Mr. Munster could let again, or induce some of his friends to share "at an increased rate," as Mr. Cutpurse observed, and which remark we must do Bobby the justice to say, he would have resented by knocking him down, but he could not afford the luxury at that moment. It may seem odd that Mr. Cutpurse should have had so much shooting on hand, but we are in a position to state that it was the same which he had already proposed to let to Crackenthorpe. Two strings to your bow is a prudent saying, and the lawyer acted up to it. Truth to say, he had no idea that Tom would have gone down, and still less that he would take it. He looked undecided, and came to so little explanation, that he could easily back out, and as to letting so brilliant an opportunity as the present escape him, it was not to be thought of. So before Mr. Munster had got possession of the cheque, it was arranged that the price of the shooting was to be deducted, with the percentage, and Bobby departed, richer than when he came to town by 325*l.* (minus some moderate charges for stamp and professional attendance), and by 2,000 acres of excellent shooting for the month of September, over which his friend Crackenthorpe was just then preparing to make his survey.

Amongst other odd properties, the possession of Munster, was a pointer, better known than trusted about Pumpington, a bandy-legged, overgrown brute, remarkable as a thief, and for his surly, ill-conditioned temper. For some reason or other Bobby was extremely fond of Sancho, whom his friends called The Butcher, and was always loud in praise of his capabilities, of which he, Bobby, could know nothing, and of his breed, of which he must have known less. By a piece of excellent luck this animal was at present a mile or two only from town, and could be got at a moment's notice. He employed, therefore, the rest of the day in equipping himself with powder, shot, wads, and the hundred somethings he required. He telegraphed to his landlady at

Pumpington for a sufficiency of clothes to last for a few days, to be sent up by the evening train; and by the early train the next morning, armed *cap-à-piè*, Sancho and all, he was ready to take the field, which he did with certain results.

"Now, sir," said Tim Farbrace to Crackenthorpe; "this way, through they swedes; our beat begins here."

"Oh, yes; but it's such a nice evening that I should prefer walking out to the further end of the beat first; and perhaps we can run over it all at one go," replied the master.

"Lor bless yer, sir! that's a long way round; besides, I knows there's birds here. Hie in, Nell," said the man, who had already got Nell from a cottage hard by, and here Nell began to draw. "Dang the dorg! blow'd if she won't have all the birds in the country afore her before long; steady, bitch, steady;" as a small covey rose.

"I should like to see the other side of the country," said Tom, putting his hand into his pocket, and lighting a regalia, without moving.

As it seemed clear to Mr. Farbrace that nothing now was to be done, he turned sulky, whistled Nell off, and returned to the road.

"Now, then, which way?" said Crackenthorpe.

"Oh! whichever way you likes, in course, sir; that's ourn, all along here; anywheres as you like; dang the dorg! come in;" and here he gave her a kick.

In fact, as the keeper became more and more sulky, Crackenthorpe became more and more determined; and, having now reached the furthest limit, he turned straight into a very likely-looking piece of clover. "Now, then, let the bitch hunt," said he.

"No offence, sir, but master don't quite like us to go into that clover; you see, it 'ud be different if you was already the—the—if you had the shooting, I mean, sir?" and here Mr. Farbrace looked spiteful as well as sulky. But it was no use to hang back, for by this time Crackenthorpe was well into the clover, already wet with the evening dew.

I need hardly say that not a bird could be found. Nell was to-hoed and so-hoed, and cursed and praised alternately, but Nell could not make birds; and as Farbrace had sent as many as he could on to the other beat, there was nothing to be hoped for until the present performance was got through. Crackenthorpe persevered, with a face now radiant with hope, now wandering into doubt, at last settling into despair; Tim Farbrace cursing first his luck, then his dog, then the weather, and then the poachers; but he "knowed what it was—that fellow Thistledown had been driving them;" and "it worn't no use a going on to-

night ;" while Mr. Crackenthorpe got more cheerful as he realized the situation, and merely determined that he would not take the shooting at any price—"Why, you know there isn't a partridge in it."

"Well, I know there was some not an hour ago." This was true, for he had driven them out. And so on they walked, Mr. Crackenthorpe stopping occasionally to light a regalia, and on one occasion to turn some stones out of his boots. He had nearly exhausted his patience, when a proposal of some coolness checked him for a moment, to which, after some consideration, he assented.

"You don't seem altogether satisfied, sir; but I think, if you'll wait till to-morrow mornin', I can show you as good a bit of sport as you or any other man has got;" and here he turned on one side to let the proposal take its chance.

To-morrow, thought Tom. That's a day lost, I suppose. However, being here, and having nothing to do, suppose I give him the trial. "Can I have a bed at the cottage?" The surly keeper didn't "know as he couldn't." "But what am I to do for a gun?" The keeper, finding his prospects better, thought as he "know'd where he could borrow one." Having got thus far, Crackenthorpe made up his mind to forego the pleasures of decent living for a night, and see the other side of the field, and the adventure. He ate some poached eggs and bacon—a thing he hated; and read "The Field" from beginning to end—angling and all; and naturally fell asleep.

Meantime Bobby Munster arrived at the Axall Station the next morning, just as Crackenthorpe and Tim Farbrace were departing on their excursion; and, as Tim had made a successful foray upon his neighbour's turnips, and driven in some half-dozen coveys or so, he had no fears for the result, and started in high fettle. But "there is many a slip between the cup and the lip;" and a little telegram having reached Mr. Thistledown about seven a.m. to have all things in readiness for the stockbroker, who had changed his mind, he did what every rational man would do. He preferred his own interests to those of his friend, and went and drove back all his own birds, which had been lent to be shot at, and a few more original coveys which really belonged to the invaluable manor of Cutpurse and Company. The consequence of this new arrangement was another walk for Crackenthorpe, and a fresh disappointment for Tim Farbrace. Not a bird was to be found. It must be admitted that it was a villanous day. A fog, like a cold blanket, wrapped all things, vegetable and animal, in its icy folds. The sun endeavoured to dissipate it, but utterly failed; and by ten o'clock Cracks had walked about seven miles, had had two shots, and killed nothing; and the keeper's sulkiness

had arrived at a most formidable pitch. Like a rat in a corner, he had lost all hope, and assumed the boldness of despair. Cracks had just begun to debate within himself whether he should abandon the field at once, and seek shelter in dry boots and socks and the next train, when they were startled by a shot not far from them—audible, but in the fog not visible. At the same moment a coarse, overgrown pointer rushed straight into the first covey they had seen, in full pursuit, right through *their turnips*, in chase of a hare.

"Oh! I'm darned," said Mr. Farbrace. "Here, give us your gun, sir; that's the way the birds is druv;" and, seizing the gun at once out of Crackenthorpe's hand, he let fly at the dog. It was too far to have killed the intruder outright; but it so far recalled him to himself, that he seated himself at once, and gave vent to a succession of dismal howls—turning and twisting about for the best part of a minute, as Farbrace said, "as if he had been shot." And then away he went as hard as his legs could carry him.

"Sarve him right, he's always a-poaching."

At this instant, looming through the fog, came the respectable owner in angry search—"Confound it, sir! what are you doing on my land!" said Mr. Munster, rather doubtful whether he was not trespassing.

"Why, Munster!"

"What, Tom!"

"What in the world brought you here?" said Tom Crackenthorpe, beginning to calculate.

"Why, the rail to be sure," replied Bob, thunderstruck; "but have you seen my old dog? he came right across here, and I've lost him in the fog."

"Yes, Bobby," said Tom; "I'm sorry to say we have seen your old dog, and, what's more, we've—we've shot him!"

The explanations deserve another chapter.

—♦—



to swallow that. Paid for? No, no; you're not so green as all that. Why, there's scarcely a bird on it."

"How the dence do you know that?"

"Because I've been nearly all over it. Dash it! there go the birds while we've been making a row here," said Tom, good humouredly, and cocking his gun whilst they flew cheerfully over the fence.

Here Tim Farbrace interposed, assuring them both that the manor was full of birds, but that they had evidently been disturbed.

"Ah!" said he, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking straight into the fog, "pity to-o be-e sure! There they goes again, lots on 'em, right on to Squire Tiffin's land. There's a most o' our birds down in them beans, I know."

"When did they get up? I didn't see any birds."

"No more did I," said both of them at once.

"No," said Mr. Farbrace, with a supercilious laugh, "you gents wasn't a looking, but I see 'em fast enough. That's where they got up—in that green patch o' turmits;" and here he pointed indiscriminately into the distance.

At this moment the sun broke out, clearing up the thick vapour partially, and discovering under its veil a fine country and cheerful landscape.

"Come, Bob, it's no use squabbling here about this beastly shooting; it's so bad that, though you're perfectly welcome to it, I can't conceive how you could be such a fool as to pay for it."

"But I have. I'll tell you all about it by-and-bye."

Bob had almost forgotten Sancho, till recalled to the painful recollection by the keeper's old bitch, who had been wagging her tail, and pottering about the turnips, till she came to a point. "I know'd there was birds," said Farbrace. "To-ho, steady, good bitch; have a care! Now then, gentlemen, here they are; get round her quick." In obedience to which command, Munster, with both barrels ready, and his eyes half out of his head, circumnavigated the stanch old Nell. There was a movement—as Bob thought, an attempt to rise; a considerable rustling of the leaves; and then something brown bounded over the tops of the turnips. Bang! went Bobby Munster's barrel, and sudden stillness gave evidence of his success as a sportsman.

"Darn'd if you ain't done it now, sir!" said Mr. Farbrace, emphatically; and running to the spot, he clapped his foot upon the fluttering bird, as Munster supposed, which was hidden by the green tops, the evidence of a very wet autumn. "Darn'd if you ain't done it! Don't look this way—go on loadin', sir. Lawk a mercy! If he was to know this, I'm blessed if he wouldn't shoot ye."

The keeper, however, to do him justice, did not seem to take it to heart. Munster loaded in silence, and then asked very innocently what it was.

"I don't know what you calls him in your country, but you'd better come and see. I daurn't lift 'un up; I doan't want to have nothin' to do wi' the likes o' he."

And there stood Farbrace still, with his foot on the place.

"Well, what is it?" said Crackenthorpe, approaching like a cat on walnut-shells, expecting a bon-constrictor.

"Well, we calls 'un a fox; but perhaps in your country they calls 'un a rabbit!"

*Dies carbone notanda!* this was a mistake; and in a country "in the immediate neighbourhood of two packs of hounds!" But Cracks and Munster were men of some energy; so the best thing was to get rid of their burden.

"Hadn't we better drag him to the hedge?"

"Lord bless you, sir! it's as much as my life's worth, if I was to be seen; we must bury him here."

And pretty sure of a handsome tip, and no more trouble with his customers, it was astonishing how complaisant Mr. Farbrace became.

"There, gents, just you stay while I fetches something from the cottage, and we'll have him in, in no time."

And away he went.

The little mishap restored peace on the only grounds that can make it lasting—mutual interest and mutual fears. No further inquiries were instituted after Sancho; and they took the opportunity of the keeper's absence to unbosom themselves to one another. Crackenthorpe was not, as Munster supposed, down with Bingham and Lord Cropperton, but wanted a week or two's shooting before the cottage could be furnished or the stables filled. He had come down to look at it, and found it wanting in every requisite. Bobby delivered a round unvarnished tale, and astonished Cracks.

"Then this is really your shooting, and Cutpurse deducted the rent," said he.

"That's a peculiarity common, however, to all bill-discounters," rejoined Robert Munster; "and the transaction is, at all events, more respectable than old bottles, pictures, or hearth-stones, all of which I have had to take, in my time, instead of coin of the realm."

"But not more profitable, Bob! What are you going to do down here? There's scarcely a head of game on the manor. Are you sure Cutpurse is not in with this fellow Farbrace and his mother, who provides the lodging for his tenants?"

This was a not improbable notion of Crackenthorpe's, and worthy of a shrewder person than he.

"Perhaps it may be. I didn't say anything about lodging; I only understood, there was a habitable cottage, from him."

"Did the agent tell you much about it? He was mighty communicative to me."

"Agent! Oh! I dealt with Cuts himself — infernal old Jew! He never trusts any agent but himself. He's an agent himself—to the devil!"

"But he's gone abroad," said Crackenthorpe, who, however, began to smell a rat, and to wonder what a horsewhipping would cost.

"Is he? then it's this morning by the early boat. But here comes the keeper, at last. What a nuisance this is! I suppose he'll hold his tongue."

And so they buried the fox and their difference about the dog, and resumed their journey in amicable silence.

Tom Crackenthorpe was rather disgusted at the manner in which he had been treated by Messrs. Cutpurse and Co.; and he conceived that he was justified in taking some means for resenting it. Bobby Munster was not averse to anything that could be suggested. He felt that he had been done in the matter of the birds; and he thought 175*l.* strong interest on the 500*l.* he had been supposed to borrow for six months. It was therefore arranged between them that they would put old Cutpurse in the hole, as far as that gentleman was to be caught by a very civil invitation to shoot his own birds, when an introduction to Mr. Crackenthorpe should take place; and a pleasant alternative of the return of the money, wholly or in part, or a submission to the pump and a general publication of his rascality, might be presented to him. This required some discretion, and could only be managed by Bobby Munster. In the meantime, shooting was a farce, as indeed Tim Farbrace at length admitted, upon a handsome tip to preserve the secret of vulpicide; his own participation making it as desirable for him as for his employers that they should not be found out. They had just decided upon returning home, when a positive covey settled beneath their noses on the other side of the fence. Human nature could not stand that. There are virtuous men, as well as women, in the world; but no virtue could have resisted such a temptation. Munster was, at half a bound, in the hedge, having surmounted a wide ditch on the taking off-side; and Cracks was preparing to follow, when Mr. Farbrace interfered.

"Can't go there, sir!"

"Why not?" said Munster.

"Cos it ain't ours," replied the man in authority.

"Oh! come, that won't do. It is ours—at least it must be Cutpurse's. I know it is. We'll make it so. Put your long body into that ditch, and we'll take our chance. Come on Tom."

And they were soon in the beans, which looked nice and light at the side, and soon became as stiff and as thick as good clay could make them. "Whirr, whirr!" went the birds on every side; "bang, bang!" went the sportsmen. Very fortunately they were not the best of shots, so that they were spared the trouble of looking about for their game, which is troublesome under the circumstances. Now and then, however, they recovered a stray bird that fell in a rather clearer spot. Still the birds rose; what they couldn't see they heard, as deeper and deeper into the field they got.

"There must be some shooting here on this side," said Bob to himself; "when the beans are cut, they must go to our turnips."

"What, where the fox lies buried?" said Tom, who was quite jovial, considering he was poaching, and knew it.

"Hold hard, Cracks—stoop down! Here's a bald-headed old giant ordering us to surrender. I suppose he's the owner."

And true enough, ten yards off stood a violent gesticulating old gentleman, mopping his bald head, and swearing frightfully at the intruders.

"Come out of that, sir," roared he, smashing among the beans in his excitement. "Who are you, and what the devil are you doing here? Is this my property, I should like to know, or not?"

"No, it is Mr. Cutpurse's, I believe," said a voice from the beans, where it was unsuccessfully buried as far as concealment was concerned; whilst Tom held his head up, and kept his tongue quiet, as under the orders of the "gentleman to whom the shooting belonged!"

"Mr. Cutpurse is a dirty money-lending blackguard; and I desire to know who you are, that have been poaching here among my beans?"

Here the bald head was covered by a wide-awake of portentous dimensions, and a hand was raised, flourishing a formidable stick.

"My name is Munster, sir, the tenant of this shooting; and I beg to endorse your opinion of the scoundrel Cutpurse most cordially." And here no end of birds, and one gun went off.

"Will you come out of that, sir, or will you not? I preserve this shooting most strictly for my most intimate friend, Lord Cropperton."

"Cropperton! My dear sir, I beg you ten thousand pardons. Then I fear we have been trespassing: how can I sufficiently

This was a not improbable notion of Crackenthorpe's, and worthy of a shrewder person than he.

"Perhaps it may be. I didn't say anything about lodging; I only understood, there was a habitable cottage, from him."

"Did the agent tell you much about it? He was mighty communicative to me."

"Agent! Oh! I dealt with Cuts himself — infernal old Jew! He never trusts any agent but himself. He's an agent himself — to the devil!"

"But he's gone abroad," said Crackenthorpe, who, however, began to smell a rat, and to wonder what a horsewhipping would cost.

"Is he? then it's this morning by the early boat. But here comes the keeper, at last. What a nuisance this is! I suppose he'll hold his tongue."

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"Cropperton! My dear sir, I beg you ten thousand pardons. Then I fear we have been trespassing: how can I sufficiently

apologize for my inadvertency, and that of my friend Mr. Crackenthorpe?" Bob took the initiative on his own estate.

"Crackenthorpe! Crackenthorpe! Bless me! is that Mr. Crackenthorpe of Pumpington? This is a most fortunate meeting, upon my word." And away went the old gentleman through the beans, laying all before him, to seize the hand of the passive Mr. Thomas Cracks, who stared in the most bewildered manner.

"And you, sir," said he, turning to Mr. Munster; "excuse me if I expressed myself warmly; but Cutpurse is a —— scoundrel; and this *is* my shooting; and you've been deceived, sir. We're both right and we're both wrong. My name is Tiffin. Mr. Crackenthorpe, your father was one of my earliest friends; and how is Mrs. Crackenthorpe? better for her visit to the south-west coast? But come, gentlemen, luncheon is ready, and my house is not two fields off." And away he strode with an energy which soon made a lane through the beans which he preserved for his best of friends, Lord Cropperton.

Under such favourable auspices it did not take long to get through mutual explanations. Indeed, he was just as ready to forego them as he had been to demand them; and when the hat and stick were hung up in the hall of a very pretty country-house, and the bald head had seated itself at the top of the luncheon-table, a more cheerful, good-humoured old gentleman could scarcely have been met with. It was with great regret that both the adventurers admitted their want of clothes, and the necessity for refusing his kind invitation for the present. But they promised to return after their visit to Lushenham, and tax his hospitality and shooting, with their friends Lord Cropperton and Bingham, at an early date.

When retailing their sport they forgot to mention the little accident with the fox; and I had almost forgotten to tell the reader that Flora Tiffin was one of the very prettiest girls in that part of the country, and quite attraction enough to the susceptible, without the addition of standing beans.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## A FEW NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

Mr. and Mrs. — I beg pardon, the Rev. Daniel and Mrs. Partington, were taking tea in the Vicarage of Lushenham. I cannot say I am partial to that wholesome meal. I am fond of a large basin of the beverage at certain times, and have drunk it cold, out shooting, without a shudder; but the meal, as accompanied with buttered toast, is horrible. I quite believe in its tendency to scandal; and if not a slow poison to the body, it is so to the mind. I am not partial to beer-drinking after breakfast; but it is a manly dissipation connected with the University boat and hot coppers, which tea at 7 p.m. is not. Be that as it may, the Vicar and Mrs. P.—as she was sometimes called—were enjoying that meal as if it had been their last.

“Well, my dear, he’s arrived at last,” said Daniel, with his mouth full of muffin, spluttering away, as he usually did, fast enough to catch a mail-train, and almost loud enough to break the window. “He’s come down to see how the workmen get on, and he’s in such a state of excitement! How he was blowing them up about the stables, and the gable-ends, and all! Just what I said, my dear—too much ornament. Yes, Matilda, another cup. Toast? Yes. Four horses coming down, and no room to put ‘em.”

“Stall, I suppose you mean,” said Mrs. Partington, gravely.

“Stall! well, didn’t I say so? Thank you, Josephine. One more lump. Bless me, how the evenings draw in!”

“No, you said room, my dear.” But Partington was far a-head of his slowly moving wife, and went on just as rapidly with his mouth full. “Capital rooms—22 by 18 the drawing-room, and a new marble chimney-piece in the breakfast-room, where old Simcox used to smoke his pipe of an evening.”

“And what sort of a person is your new parishioner, pa, dear?” said Matilda, who presided at the tea-table, and set the fashions at Lushenham.

“Oh! bad style—bad style; smokes, and all that sort of thing, *you know*.” Which they did, about as well as Partington himself. You see he was slightly prejudiced; and a large regalia, a puff of which accidentally went down his throat, made the little man irritable. By the way, he was a little man—a very small man indeed; and his mind was about fitted to his body. He was sharp, brisk, active; with a tawny skin, straight black hair, coal-



black eyes, a very long and thin nose, a Newgate fringe, three shirts a week, and a white stock to match, buckled behind. He was the image of an insolvent Yankee, and had as much vanity as a New England speculator. He knew everything. He described himself as a first-rate mathematician; and was not Senior Wrangler or Master of Trinity by the merest accident; indeed, he *preferred* the mastership of a grammar-school in Natal, which he had lately exchanged with a man in the last stage of consumption for the small living of Lushenham. Sharpening the teeth generally tends to blunt the tongue, but Partington talked faster than ever whilst eating, and spluttered over everybody and everything in his anxiety to get the talk all to himself. He was the vulgarest little dog alive. But he had his redeeming points—as who has not?—only at present we have not got to them.

His wife was a totally different person. She was slow to move in body and mind—very fat, heavy, and magnificent. A large plain face, with eyes and hair like the Gorgon, the latter of which was splendid in quantity and colour, and twisted in snake-like folds over her head. She was no beauty; but in opposition to the mathematician, sported “the classical” in all its severity, but none of its taste. Her prevailing characteristics were, a determination to marry Matilda and Josephine to eligible *partis*, and an intense admiration for her husband, exclusive of his opinions. The African settlement of Dotheboys had thriven, so that the Partingtons were well-to-do people, and kept a “one-horse shay.” Matilda and Josephine were the belles of Lushenham—not bad-looking, certainly, and, adopting the fashions of the year before last, they were great authorities with the farmers’ and tradesmen’s daughters, who saw them at church or elsewhere. They were also taken by the hand by a Lady Bountiful or two in the neighbourhood, and consequently held themselves high; laughed at one another about nothing under an infantry officer, and much more frequently about the young squires with whom they danced once a year at the Snareborough Hunt Ball. What was stated by the Vicar at his 7 p.m. meal was strictly true. He was the gossip of the country; made it his business to have a finger in every pie; and Tom Crackenthorpe had not been in the village half an hour before the Vicar had seen him smoke and heard him swear. His wife would have declined this office for herself, and despised it in another; she admired and profited by it in her dear Daniel.

When Crackenthorpe arrived at the château—in other words, at the farm-house—of which he was tenant on a long and repairing lease, he found a young architect, a friend of old Sparkes, had already gone to work in the ornamental line. Nothing could be done without a touch of the mediæval, and the style is expensive, especially when the property is not your own. What made it

still worse was, that everything had been done which he did not want, and nothing done which he did. It ought to have been half finished; there was scarcely a room with a floor for himself to sleep in, and not a box or stall for a horse. It seemed as if all young Pinnacle's work had been to make the old part damp, and take away the stairs from the single room he might have slept in. At present it was only rich in gable-ends. The village public, however, was available, and they did their best for the new tenant of Boulter's Farm. It was slowly emerging into an ornamental villa of great price—that jolly-looking, old-fashioned farm-house, where Cracks meant to foster the spirit of domestic poetry within him, and a fit of economical respectability more suited to his prospects. He was a great lion during the three days he stayed. He might have been a greater but for a strange coincidence. At this very time a neat little cottage at the far end of the village was being whitewashed, newly papered and painted, and a couple of loose boxes fitted up, for a young widow lady and her mother. What could have brought them to Lushenham, above all places in the world? Not gaiety, nor love of scenery, nor climate, nor association—for they knew nobody. Perhaps economy, or seclusion, or both. Never mind. They had taken the cottage; they were coming in next month. They had already passed a few days there; and not without comment.

"Most extrordinary! most extrordinary!" said the Vicar, who did not spell it so, but pronounced it short. "Such a very pretty woman! But I've found out something about her. Curious case—separation—separation—incompatibility of temper. Most distressing thing."

"Do you mean for her or for us?" said Mrs. Partington, regarding her own girls with a melancholy smile, and thinking of Crackenthorpe at the same time.

"Oh! for her, of course. Nothing to us, my dear. Duty to perform; sift the thing to the bottom. Crackenthorpe's going to-morrow; I hear there's a lady in the case. A little of that cold shoulder, my dear."

This was at supper. Mrs. Partington rose majestically.

"My dear Daniel, how can you?—before the dear girls, too?"



## CHAPTER XIV

## A GENERAL INSPECTION.

TIME rolled slowly on. It does so when one has a legacy to receive or a house to enter upon. Crackenthorpe ran backwards and forwards from Pumpington to Lushenham to look at his improving property. He superintended the stable department, leaving the chimneys and drainage to those who knew more about them. This was not an unprofitable mode of passing his time, in the absence of Munster, Bingham, Lord Cropperton, and the rest of his friends, who were all shooting. There is no doubt that he threw a little energy and a good deal of beer into the workmen when he inquired so perseveringly after the new mantelpiece, or suggested a slight alteration in the dining-room bow. Pumpington, too, was happy to see that he was still amongst the paraders at four or five p.m. General Bulrush had not quite given him up as incorrigible; Miss Marian thought he wanted nothing but a little foreign travel to make him quite polished; so he was compelled to a heavy dinner or two. Sparkes was curiously anxious to see him on business which Tom imagined to be settled when the workmen went in. With the girls he was obliged to come to a compromise by mounting the family at a review of the Pumpington Volunteers; their affection had been floating about after him since the ball, on triangular pink papers. A bold man would have affronted it; a coward would have run away from it. Tom was neither, and endured it as well as he could. To confess the truth, there were times when it amused him; and he was not always disinclined for a "spoon." The difficulty was, then, to choose.

About this time accident rendered him more than usually callous to the charms of the Spa. Crackenthorpe had been looking over a half-finished garden-wall, smoking a regalia, as usual, and wondering when the stables would have any doors; solacing his intervals with the contents of a large pewter pot, and thinking it must be nearly time to set out again, if he meant to be in at the old General's dinner, when he heard the sound of a horse's foot, and, looking up, beheld a very pleasant vision of a fair spirit. On a good-looking horse, unmistakably a hunter, and not a hack, rode a very pretty woman—rather the sort that Tom admired. She was of fair complexion, good red and white, her colour probably heightened by the exercise, with fine hazel eyes and straight features. Her mouth was full and bold, but clearly

enough defined; her hair was light brown, and well dressed—not a lock out of place. She wore a hat of the most practical, unromantic shape; and her habit of dark blue was short, plain, and admirably fitted to a rather full form. The lady sat well back on her horse, and held up her head as if she were not ashamed of it; looked at Tom, then at the sky, then patted and spoke a word to her horse, exhibiting that sort of embarrassment that may be felt, but cannot be described. The horse answered it by shaking his head and putting back his ears; and the vision was gone, not into thin air, but round the corner, towards the newly whitewashed and painted cottage. She was followed by a small groom, whose boots fitted him badly, and who looked less comfortable than his mistress. He rode a class of horse not usually wasted upon 5st. 8lb.; he was a hunter, much after the fashion of his fellow, but stronger, and showing symptoms of more work.

“So-o-o!” thought Tom; “so that’s the widow that’s been expected here so long; and a very pretty woman, too. Who or what can she be? She can’t be come here hunting with her mother alone; that’s impossible. There must be somebody in the background. How, in the name of fortune, can one find out? There goes the postman; perhaps he knows.”

The postman was as ignorant and benighted as if he had never been in the village before. Her name was Greystoke, and the old lady was Mrs. Bransby; that was all he knew. “See’d the ’osses out exercizin’ in the mornin’, when he come with the letters; nice ’osses they was, too.” The postman was not averse to talking, but he clearly had nothing to tell. Then he turned to a favourite carpenter, who had been a great participator in Tom’s liberality in the matter of public-house beer, and who was just giving a finishing touch to an angel’s trumpet intended for one of the cornices. The carpenter was a most respectable man in the matter of everything but drink; and delicately hinted that the lady in question might not be quite so good as she ought to be.

“Looks a little queer, sir, don’t it?—leastways, I don’t understand none o’ them things.”

A bricklayer here winked his eye, intimating that Sawyer was not so innocent as he pretended to be.

“Why, Joe, can’t ye tell the gentleman as she and her mother has been here two or three times a-lookin’ at the cottage. He knows all about it, sir; he was here the last time the lady was here, and showed her the rooms. You know you did, Joe. But, lauk! there ain’t no harm. She’s a regular lady, and gave us half a crown to drink when she went away.”

“How long is she going to stay—do you know that?” said Tom.

"She's got the cottage for three year; they wouldn't do it up and put it in repair for less time than that."

"Well, just go round and tell my groom to come with the dog-cart; it's getting on. Will those stalls be all right by next week?"

"Yes, sir, I'll warrant they will; and you'll be in the house the first of November. It's all warm and dry now; and we'll have some good fires in it next week, and keep 'em up."

The whitewashed cottage had assumed a cheerful appearance. Under a sort of rough cultivation, the luxuriance of the creepers had been trimmed, the borders had been raked over, the box-edges had been cut, and the ragged-looking lawn shaven. Inside, a new paper or two had given a bright, cheerful look to the low, old-fashioned rooms; a warm-coloured carpet, soft and thick, provided against winter; charming little nicnacs, enamels, mosaics, Louis Quatorze patterns, Dresden and Sèvres cups (real or imitation), water-colour sketches, a chromo-lithograph or two, foot-stools covered with Berlin wool, and some fancifully bound keepsakes, albums, and Mudie's well-thumbed volumes, proclaimed a few of the tastes of women. A small dog-whip and collar, a fox's brush neatly handled, a screen covered with sporting subjects from Alken, Herring, and Leech, and a lady-like hunting-whip hanging on a nail behind the door, clearly a favourite, gave evidence of more manly occupations. There were no flowers, no work. The room represented the only sitting-room besides the dining-parlour, and there was a piano.

It was a cool evening towards the end of September or beginning of October. The grate was more cheerful for the little fire that burnt in it: the shutters were closed, and the lamp was lit. On one side sat Mrs. Bransby, a portly, dark-eyed, red-faced woman of about sixty. She was very richly dressed; and her stumpy fingers exhibited many and expensive rings. She wore a marvellous cap of many colours; and was warming her feet on the fender. The old lady was nearly asleep, and nodded her head so frightfully, that the particoloured cap and her brown front were considerably out of the perpendicular. Her daughter read the last new novel by the light of the lamp, occasionally interrupting her mother in her occupation by a trivial remark. This was the horsewoman who had presented so charming a picture to our hero, that he went home to Pumpington and broke his idols, the Sparkeses, the Bulrushes, and others, and determined henceforth to worship none but his new divinity.

"Mother," said the divinity, "you'll be in the fire in a minute, and then we shall have the house burnt down."

"Nonsense, my dear!" replied Mrs. Bransby, once more settling herself and her wig pretty straight in her chair; "I

know how to take care of myself. I suppose Miss Partington won't be here to-night; she never comes so late as this."

"It's impossible to say. She has as much curiosity as her father, and as much brass as her mother. How long is this to last, Mrs. Bransby?"

This was said with a curl of the handsome lip, which looked something like irony.

"The game is a good one to play out, and you seem to have some cards in your hand, Miss Lilian."

"Oh, bother Lilian, mother. Call me Kitty; it's much pleasanter for a change; and there's nobody here, that it matters much to be so particular."

"But I want to get into the way of it; and there's no performing in public without plenty of rehearsals. But, Kitty, then, if you like; I suppose we shall have Mr. Crackenthorpe and his friend back soon, and then the play must begin."

"Don't you think we are playing a bold game, Mrs. Bransby?"

"Not a bit too bold. We're pretty nearly at the end of our string, and the kite won't fly any more without running. Something must be done."

"Won't the money do without the man?" said the younger.

"Of course it will; but how are you to get it?" asked the elder.

"He's fond of play."

"So are you, more than of work. But marriage is the thing." The widow turned pale. "There's no risk there; and as he comes alone (there are no women in the way) you ought to have a good chance. I think the new character will do. He's fond of a sporting woman, you know, we heard that in town; and I think the new character will suit you well. It's nearly a clear field."

"That old Gorgon of a parson's wife and her stupid daughter are not worth naming, you think?" And Kitty scarcely looked up.

"She's an artful woman, that Partington, so you must be sure and make friends with her; and as to her ugly daughter, the more you're seen with her the better for you. I wish she'd take to riding."

"I've persuaded her that it's good for her health; and her father intends to indulge her with the white cob. What a couple they'll be!"

"Ring the bell, Kitty—Lilian I mean. If you don't let me practise your new name, I shall never do it. 'Lilian Greystoke'—that's it—will you ring the bell? Nobody will come to-night, now; so we'll have in the kettle, and finish the evening." And here old Mrs. Bransby kicked off her shoes, and spread herself out, and Mrs. Greystoke rang the bell.

When the water and glasses made their appearance, which they did in a few minutes, the servants were ordered to bed, excepting the lady's confidential maid; and the lovely widow, having produced something to put into the water, from a cupboard hard by, resumed her story, which had been interrupted, and with the additional pleasure of hot whisky and water.

And what had become of Tom Crackenthorpe? He went back disconsolately to Pumpington: after seeing the pretty widow, his female friends became more distasteful than ever. He longed for the 1st of November. Meantime, he saw no means of making the lovely stranger's acquaintance. He could do nothing by remaining where he was. What should he do? Go abroad, and ease his mind and his pocket by a little *rouge-et-noir*? But nothing makes a man so virtuous as love at first sight; and he felt convinced that his widow would not approve of Baden-Baden or Homburg. Should he try the Rhine for a fortnight or three weeks? The very thing; without diverting his mind, those undulating hills and that monotonous scenery might soothe the unhappy Cracks. Alone, too! There was to be no Robert Munster, no *mal-à-propos* jokes, no irrelevant anecdotes. The Rhine and the widow were to share his meditations.

Before starting, amongst other matters, he must complete his stud. A sale at Boote's Repository was the most opportune thing alive; so, the last day but one before his departure for London on his way to Cologne, he dressed himself with considerable care—I suppose, in consideration of his mistress, who was not to see him—and set out for the Repository at mid-day.

We need not describe a provincial Tattersall's. Everybody round Pumpington knows the red face, round collars, broad-brimmed hat, and bright and light clothing of Mr. Boote. In September there were usually a few studs up, or rather the drafts from a few studs, from the North or the South, but not from the well-known *habitués* of the county. It served to fill up time, and a gap in the stable, if any real information could be got: if not, the proceeding was full of risk. However, Tom's was a jovial turn of mind; and, as he observed, "it must be an uncommonly bad animal that he couldn't put to some sort of use, with such a fellow as Bobby Munster to bed and board." Upon this principle, he waited until a good-looking horse was brought out, called "Acheron"—because he was so *infernally* bad, his owner afterwards admitted. He was put up: and the case appeared so suspicious, that he was knocked down to Tom, without any opposition for forty guineas.

"Cheap horse, 'pon my soul!" said Billy Duckworth, who was dressed in a louder pattern than usual, with a bright scarlet

neckcloth, and a shirt-collar on which was exhibited a whole steeple-chase—"very cheap—cheap as dirt."

"You shall have him for sixty," said Tom: "there's a bargain; and I'll buy another."

Duckworth seemed in a hurry about something, and looked at his watch.

"Oh, there's lots of time. You'd better ride him. Here, Jim" (we need hardly say that Crackenthorpe was hail fellow well met with the establishment), "put a saddle on that horse, No. 34—Acheron they call him."

Jim stared, but did not obey with his customary alacrity.

"Now, stupid! what are you staring at?"

Still Jim hesitated, looked knowingly at Tom, and shifted a bundle he held from his left arm to his right.

"Don't you hear? Make haste! Mr. Duckworth is going to have a ride."

"Oh, Mr. Duckworth. Yes, sir. Certainly, sir." And Jim dived into the stable at once.

Duckworth had not intended a display: his costume was a morning pedestrian parade. Being taken unawares, he was weaker than usual; and as the Pumpington swells had now collected in full force round Tom, he had less courage than ever to refuse. Acheron came out so mildly, so quietly, that a more consummate Master of the Horse would have had his suspicions. Billy Duckworth was reassured. After five minutes of careful inspection, Billy prepared to vault into his seat, "like feathered Mercury." He was fairly down, with his head towards the gateway, and his reins held in that comfortable *négligé* which looks so well in Rotten Row, on a well-bitted cob, or with Mr. Rice, when got up for his Piccadilly lounge. Jim patted Acheron proudly on the neck, when before an exclamation of the briefest admiration had passed a lip, the horse shot straight up into the air, at the same time putting up his back, and sending Mr. Duckworth on to his, in the middle of the yard. Having done this, he trotted once round the yard, with his head and tail well up, and walked safely into the twelve-stall stable again. In the course of five minutes he performed this conjuring trick three times—until, indeed, there were no more at half a crown a head willing to try; and some ignominious chaff took place between Tom Crackenthorpe and his friends as to the value of his purchase. Tom, however, was deaf to all offers—even to a *bonâ fide* 30*l.* from a half tipsy cornet of dragoons, who would send him to the riding-school. "No, no," said Tom: "I can't afford to lose money. Besides, I want the horse. I've got a mount for that d—d lawyer, old Cutpurse, at last: it's better than assault and battery, and quite as cheap."



"Beg pardon, sir—I think you're the gentleman as boug our Hacheron?" said a good-looking groom to Tom, as he was moving towards the street.

"I am the fortunate possessor of that seemingly amiable beast. As I have bought him, perhaps you will tell me something about him."

"Good 'oss, sir—anyhow, for them as can ride him," said the groom, touching his hat, and looking as serious as if he was recommending Tom to go to a charity-sermon on Sunday next.

"And what did you sell him for?" asked Tom, *naïvely* enough.

"Ah! that's just what I want to know. He could jump any mortal thing, and always fit to go; and as to ridin' of him, we'd all got accustomed to bein' chucked off on the road to cover—leastways, exceptin' master himself. I wanted him to keep him for his friends as he mounts."

"Yes, I see he can kick. Does he do anything else?"

"Well, I have seen him run away; and I think that's the reason master sent him here. But if you don't pull at him, he won't pull at you: if you do, my heye! look out for squalls. He'll go at anything; and he goes like a lion, when he do go."

"Won't refuse?"

"Not he," said the man.

"That will do: there's half a crown. He's the very thing for Cutpurse."



## CHAPTER XV

### A LITTLE TEA-PARTY AT THE VICARAGE.

CRACKENTHORPE was gone abroad; nobody knew why, nor have I the slightest conception why everybody does go abroad whenever anything goes wrong. When a man has been jilted he goes abroad: the German waters are full of blighted affections. When a man has outrun the constable, he goes abroad because he can spend more money and get less for it than at home. When some bungling sharper has been detected in a fashionable fraud with a friend's horses, or a gay Lothario with a friend's wife, pending Sir Cresswell Cresswell's interference, he goes abroad; and our Continental connections ought to be much obliged by the preference we give them. But why Crackenthorpe should have

taken it into his head that he could not be happy with Munster, or Cropperton, or Bingham, or with the fiery old Tiffin, whose charming daughter would have delighted to welcome him, I can't say. All I know is, that he was for solitude and the Rhine; and he started after having seen Acheron safely into the hands of his groom, and intrusted him with the secret connected with that "playful little dear."

If Tom expected to escape comment by absence, he was much mistaken; people wondered the more:—

*"Sublatum ex oculis, quærimus invidi."*

The world had become singularly inquisitive as to his welfare; Pumpington naturally; Sparkes pretended to know all about it: Lord Burleigh himself was not more mysterious. Bulrush was furious, and condescended to count the bottles with the blue seal that had been thrown away upon him. Marian had a quiet little cry, all to herself; and was much relieved by discovering that Amelia Sparkes was just as much in the dark as she. Lushenham was curious indeed as to his return; and as the château grew in fair proportions day by day, the owner became an object of tender solicitude—his spiritual to the Vicar, his bodily well-being to the women of the parish.

I before mentioned the cheerful tea-table of the Parsonage, with no great commendation for its bounties. If, however, tea and muffins could be made palatable, it was supposed to be so, by an adjournment of the meal to eight o'clock, and the extension of its hospitality to a few friends. If the dreary monotony of the stable-smelling footboy, in red plush breeches and striped waistcoat, the gritty cake, the aforesaid muffins, and the scalding hay could be relieved, it was to be done by an assemblage such as was to be got together, on occasion, in that cold and new-looking drawing-room. Not that it was cold, nor new; the fashion of everything in it had been so for the last twenty years; but not a thing had been used, not a seat taken out of its place, excepting at these cheerful and economical periods. Nothing so cheap as conversation. The only people who suffer are the absent, and they know nothing about it: that is, if you abuse them roundly enough: your little suggestive backbitings are very likely to find their way to the subject of them; liberal slander is hard to handle. I've heard of a wart on the nose, a cruel but true accusation, that set a parish in a flame; and I know a lawyer, a most unmitigated robber, who has never heard yet what is in everybody's mouth. The Vicar's parlour was a hot-bed of warts and robberies together.

"Dear me, Daniel! there's Mrs. Branshy and Mrs. Greystoke; it's scarcely eight o'clock yet:" and the two ladies sailed into the

room. They were amply skirted, and Mrs. Bransby had done so much to her figure-head, that it quite mystified the beholder, and carried off the attention from other parts of a sufficiently prominent figure. The widow was quite charming; a very handsome light silk dress, few but handsome ornaments, her hair beautifully dressed, and an easy assured manner, which might be consciousness of superiority, or only the result of high breeding and experience of society.

"What a pleasant evening!" said the widow, taking a seat and entering into conversation with the Vicar, leaving Mrs. Bransby to the captivations of Mrs. Partington and Matilda, who just walked into the room in the rear of the new parishioners. Mrs. Partington, who seemed to foresee some advantages to her girls, from a very pretty woman who kept a brougham and a couple of saddle horses, was bent on being agreeable. Opening her eyes, therefore, and setting her teeth in a manner that was meant for a smile, she proceeded to do the amiable. She praised the cottage, the horses, and the sweet little groom with the big boots; then she touched on the widow herself *sotto voce*: so young, so interesting, and fond of horse exercise, but no one to ride with her. Oh! the girls—one of the girls would enjoy riding with dear Mrs. Greystoke so; to be sure, the grey was but a sorry animal, but it might please Mrs. Greystoke. Not the Greystokes of Dorsetshire: oh! another branch! And thus this square-built and square-minded woman condescended to sacrifice her prestige as the most ferocious dragon of the neighbourhood for the sake of a prospective advantage.

Mrs. Bransby was not a lady, and she could not appear one without difficulty. But she knew that, and it gave her an advantage over many people. She knew when to hold her tongue. Her daughter was a consummate actress, and made the most of her powers; the voluble tongue and shallow intellect of the Rev. Daniel Partington had no chance with her at all.

"Horses," said he, "charm'd; lor! yes, know all about 'em, all about 'em. African horses, Cape horses, wonderful, never wear shoes, never have contracted feet. Ride: lived on horse-back, positively lived there. Mrs. Greystoke will take another cup of tea, Matilda."

"No muffin, thank you," said the widow, "we've only just dined."

"Very fond of riding? charming country to ride in; go anywhere, no gates locked; but you jump over them I suppose, Mrs. Greystoke? famous horsewoman, I hear."

"Not quite so bad as that, Mr. Partington, oh! dear no; almost a novice; but my health is not very good, and I am obliged to take rather violent exercise. One can't run, you know, nor

jump, nor play at foot-ball or cricket; so we poor women must ride. Masculine, but it can't be helped."

"Masculine! masculine! bless my heart! no, not at all." (Daniel you are a humbug.) And here the Vicar spluttered all over the room. "Nothing so beautiful as a beautiful woman on a beautiful horse."

"Daniel," said Mrs. Partington, with a tone of voice which made him jump with a guilty consciousness, "where is Josephine?"

"Josephine? oh! dear me, Josephine? she's gone to fetch Emily Gladwish." The house-bell rang, and the second daughter entered, accompanied by her friend.

Emily Gladwish was a bright, happy-looking girl, with no particular beauty, but bearing a general impression of dimples and good humour. She apologized for her want of dress, tied her bonnet on the back of her chair, where it rather shocked Mrs. Partington's company manners, and commenced a natural assault upon the cake, which she declared to be very good; and the tea, which she declared to be quite good enough, as she ought to have been in time. "But I stayed to give my father his cup of coffee, so I hope you won't be angry at my keeping Josephine."

Miss Gladwish and the widow looked at one another. The widow felt less comfortable than under the scrutiny of the Rev. Daniel and his family. The girl looked very true, and she was very decidedly good-looking; perhaps the widow saw an unwilling rivalry; Emily Gladwish saw nothing but a pretty woman, whom she did not take upon trust. There were at least three people in that room whose thoughts were employed on one person; and so conscious were they of the fact, that not one of them mentioned the name of Crackenthorpe. The two Partington girls and Mrs. Greystoke certainly wished to satisfy their curiosity; Miss Gladwish had very little curiosity upon the subject.

"And when do you expect your young neighbour?" at length said Mrs. Bransby, when the urn, and the teapot, and the muffins, and the cake had given place to a frightful sonata by Josephine, which was only to be equalled by an intended *bravura* by Matilda—"when shall we have young Mr. Crackenthorpe among us, Mr. Partington?"

"The first of November,—I know that for certain: I've seen the servant who is come down, and been into his bed-room and dressing-room. Charming house he's made of it. I asked when he was coming; his horses come next week, four of them and a hack; he's a great hunter—suit you for a neighbour, Mrs. Greystoke."

"Perhaps I may not be so easily pleased with all my neighbours as those I have the pleasure of knowing."

The Vicar felt the compliment; the widow meant to carry him by a *coup de main*. She ought to have known that she might make an enemy at the same time.

"It's a charming house. Have you seen it, Miss Gladwish?" "No." "No? dear me, odd! There's room for his wife too; the prettiest little boudoir."

"Wife?" roared all the ladies at once.

"Wife?" why, he is not married!" said Mrs. Partington, if possible more feelingly even than the daughters. As the widow knew better, she did not say anything. Her mother bore it with fortitude.

"Indeed he is, I've seen her room: and asked, and they told me she was coming down in the course of the winter. At present she is at Torquay for her health.

"Wife!" said all the women again, as if they were deeply injured; whilst a pious ejaculation found vent from the bosom of Mrs. Partington in the hope that "it was no worse."

The pretty widow and her mother rose to go. It was ten o'clock—past indeed. They never took *anything at all* before retiring; "not a drop, my dear Mrs. Partington, thank you. What a charming voice! Miss Partington must sing to me often through the winter; we are so lonely," said the widow.

"Good night, Miss Gladwish; hope we shall be better acquainted, ma'am," said Mrs. Bransby, dropping a very dignified curtsy. "Lilian, my dear, are you ready?"

"Lilian Greystoke! what a pretty name, and such charming manners!" said the Vicar.

"Quite the lady," said his daughters.

"A little too fond of admiration," said Mrs. Partington.

Emily Gladwish said nothing, but thought the more. "Where have I seen that face?"

Outside of the garden-gate, Lilian *alias* Kitty stopped Mrs. Bransby. "Now mother, hold up your head, and let's tie your bonnet. What a pack of fools to be sure!"

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## CHAPTER XVI.

## CONTINENTAL.

THE old women of both sexes made themselves happy at Lushnam over the foibles of the widow and anticipations of Crackenthorpe. Mrs. Partington shook her head, and grimly smiled, whenever the gentleman or lady were mentioned. The Vicar picked up a new *canard* daily, and sported it upon any festive occasion that fell in his way. Like most talkers, too, he was not remarkable for an adherence to facts—I mean the facts he heard or invented. He usually ornamented on Tuesday what he had hewn out in the rough on Monday; and when, by Thursday, it had received its final polish, like a renovated old coat or a well-trimmed and conditioned screw, it was scarcely recognizable. The widow, however, continued to ride; made herself agreeable to the young ladies of the neighbourhood, and the middle-aged gentlemen; flattered the weak, and succumbed to the strong. Cracks pursued his course on the salt sea.

That gentleman, the hero of my novel, can scarcely be said to have shared with Ulysses and Dr. Livingstone any peculiar love of adventure. It was not to see and to remark upon foreign shores and manners that he had left those of England; nor with any great anxiety to improve his own. He was gone abroad to indulge a restless feeling, for which he could not well account. Tom was spooney, which is a very different thing from the indulgence of a great passion—by no means a reprehensible folly in a young man, but rather tending to high aspirations and an increase of respectability. Neither was he ignorant of the proverb, though perhaps regardless of its truth, which declares that a change of atmosphere is by no means a change of sentiment. For several hours after leaving London he thought of the widow, and was not far from returning to town from Dover the self-same night. A sense of the ridiculous kept him quiet, however; and the next day he was half reconciled to his trip by the arrival of a very pretty girl with her brother, who was likely to be a *compagnon de voyage* some part of the way. Any doubt as to his final recovery was set at rest soon after embarkation.

There is such a thing as sea-sickness; and an Ostend boat pretty full of passengers was not calculated to allay it. Tom had but little experience of late in these pleasures of continental travel but hoped to escape all qualms but those of his conscience—in his case, not very severe. He lay down, therefore, in the over-

stocked cabin allotted to about thirty males, and endeavoured to fall asleep.

No doubt he would have succeeded, but for the vagaries of a fat gentleman above him. There are many remedies sold to the unwary or too wary traveller against this very prevalent malady. Gingerbread was the prevailing idea of the fat gentleman in the upper berth; and he pressed his nostrum upon his fellow-travellers with considerable liberality. It was not accepted; so he applied it to himself with redoubled vigour.

It is not to be wondered at that, before long, the effects of his remedy, clearly taken either in excess or defect, began to be felt.

"I know I shall be ill," said the fat man, tossing about most unmercifully.

"Oh, no, sir," said the steward, who is usually a comforter under the circumstances. "Lie still, sir—you'll be all right enough."

Another half hour elapsed, and Tom was dozing.

"I'm sure I shall be ill," said the same gentleman again—"quite sure."

Tom sat up in bed, not quite certain where he was. "Hullo! what are you making a row about in my room? Is that you, Bob? Oh, I beg your pardon," said Tom, recalled to his situation by a tremendous rap on the head from the roof of his berth—"I beg your pardon;" and he turned round, and sought repose once more.

He had just got rid of the widow, and might be said to have reached his first real sleep, when once more he was roused by the same miserable grumbler.

"I know I shall be ill—I'm sure of it. It's all that gingerbread. Oh, Lord! how could I be such a fool? I shall be sick, I'm quite certain." And here the fat man groaned aloud.

This was more than Tom could stand any longer, so, raising himself as well as he could from his bed, he said, with much determination and coolness—"By heavens, sir, if you're not sick at once, and hold your tongue about it, I'll pull you out of bed, and throw you overboard! That's the third time to-night you've talked about it. Everybody else has been sick this half hour." He turned on his side, as it was too dark to see the fat man's face; but he got no more sleep that night. All he says is, that he reached Ostend with a frightful appetite, and in excellent cue to enjoy a trip which he had fully intended should be as miserable as possible.

"And this is Heidelberg!" said Tom to himself, three days later, as he leant over the bridge, smoking an enormous cigar, one of a hundred which he had brought over rolled up in shirts and stowed away in socks, boots, and other parts of a gentleman's

wardrobe. It was Sunday afternoon. The bright sunshine was dancing on the river. The castle was frowning from its grim heights on the town and valley below. The populace was dressed in its Sunday clothing. The narrow streets were thronged with a mixed population of aboriginals and strangers, Romanists and Lutherans; and it was difficult to imagine, amidst joyous peals of bells, laughing faces, and bright petticoats, that this was the same holiday as that which we celebrate by a lugubrious and gloomy idleness called decorum. Tom had arrived by the rail one hour before. He had performed his ablutions at the "Prinz Karl," and was now deeply buried in thought—of course on the lovely situation, on the Neckar, the ferocious Tilly, and the misfortunes of the Thirty Years' War. What were the pictures that succeeded each other in Crackenthorpe's mind? Turenne? the chivalry of the Elector? the brutal ferocity of Melac? and the final destruction and ruin of that once-important town and castle? I am inclined to think not. He was at that moment absorbed in the external contemplation of the beautiful landscape before him, in the internal recollection of the smells which pervaded its long, narrow streets, the sharpness of its *pavé*, the plainness of its women, the tooth-breaking nature of its language, its absence of soap, and the hideous and grotesque ugliness of its student life. I forgive him for the last.

Did you ever see a German student? Of course, they *are* of all sorts; and yet they are all the same. Pipes, beer, flaxen hair, scarlet, blue, or yellow caps, convey no idea of the individual. *En masse*, they do look something like that. But we smoke pipes at our universities (*proh pudor!*), and drink beer, and wear hair in all sorts of places, and caps of all shapes and colours, and have adopted the most unmanly and unbecoming habits of mind and body at those celebrated seats of classic learning. Our young men are nearly a disgrace to the British Isles. But they are not quite German students. These latter add to a life which combines the public-house with the nursery and the playground, a great capability for playing with edged tools. They are always alive to questions which they are incapable of understanding; and they have a species of rough courage, which is the offspring of vanity and ignorance, and which only renders them the more disagreeable. Thank Goodness! we have not arrived at that pitch yet in Oxford and Cambridge—a pitch which defiles whoever handles it.

Tom Crackenthorpe was a thorough Englishman, and may be forgiven if he glared at these figures, as they lounged or rolled almost up against him, with a very marked and not pleasant expression of countenance. He had not been in Heidelberg six hours before he had exchanged looks of mutual defiance with at



least twenty of them: looks which said, "I'm an Englishman, you are only a German. I wash every day, you only on Sundays. I smoke regalias, you dirty pipes," and so on. You see Tom was but young; had been at Eton and Christchurch; and was as yet not troubled with brains. He was a good fellow in the main; but he was but mortal, and "*humanum est errare*."

He had been already nearly an hour occupied in his present amusement: now watching the people, now the clouds in the water. It was evidently a great day: no common Sunday, for the streets appeared to be getting crowded to excess. Tom looked at his watch; it still wanted half an hour to the late "table-d'hôte," at which he intended to dine. He was already wishing that he had brought Bobby Munster with him, if only to get what he wanted, and to hear the sound of his native language, when he became aware of the proximity of one of his own sex. He too was leaning over a parapet of the bridge. Englishmen who go abroad together never speak to one another, nor to any one else. An Englishman already abroad sometimes ventures upon so remarkable a solecism. He was an Englishman, that was clear; and of a particular class, better known than trusted. But Tom was not in a mood to be fastidious. Besides which, appearances were rather in favour of the stranger. Let us describe him. He was well made, tall, and good-looking; that is, he had bright eyes, a good-shaped nose, inclining to the hook; good teeth; and hair, whiskers, and moustaches of the light flying cavalry order, as opposed to the heavy, drooping style. His face looked all wings. Everything was brushed back, in the wild manner peculiar to the rollicking and fast, and to the men whose whiskers do not grow the right way.

"Fine view that. No, I don't mean that hideous beast whom you were looking after: I mean the Castle." The hideous beast was a German student; and the censure woke up a kindly feeling in Tom's breast towards the stranger.

"Yes, the country seems pretty enough," said Tom, in reply: "the Castle's beautiful, perfectly beautiful. But I never saw such a set as these men, with their extraordinary caps and pipes. What in the world are they?"

"They are the students. To-day is a great day with them. The term is over to-night; they have had a large dinner at one o'clock; and this evening the whole place will be full of them;" and here the stranger spat over the bridge into the water.

"You seem to know this place," said Tom again, after a pause. "Is there much to see in it?"

"Well! um! much? No, not much. There's the Castle, of course; and there's the Tun, holds no end of wine, you know: about 300,000 hogsheads—bottles I mean, of course; and St.

Peter's Church, where the Elector, or Luther, or some of those fellows, you know, nailed something or other on the door; and there's the club, and a lot of shops, and the Casino, and—and—here the gentleman, who knew the place so well, came to a break-down.

"Well! I must be off to dinner. Where are you?—at the 'Prinz Karl?'" said Tom.

"No, not exactly. I'm in the town, just going, too, to have some dinner," said the wild-looking stranger, not desirous of leaving our hero without some further intimacy. "I generally dine about this time." He was *abonné* at a very cheap middle-day *table d'hôte*.

"If you like to dine at the 'Karl,' I shall be happy to see you," said Cracks, in a friendly manner, and utterly oblivious of continental manners, which can ask any number of friends to a *table d'hôte* with the greatest safety, seeing every man pays for himself.

The stranger accepted the invitation. They dined together, the dinner being *à l'anglais*; that is, the cheese and green-gages were followed by "*braten*," which proved to be roast beef, and "*calb-fleisch*," which proved to be roast veal, with stewed prunes. It was all right, however, and went down under the influence of a couple of bottles of *lieb frau-milch*. It naturally went down in the bill, too, to No. 33.

Though the stranger's information on matters of historical interest was limited, his knowledge of student life and haunts was considerable. They climbed the steps of the Castle, and took more wine, more coffee, and smoked a couple of those excellent regalias, for which our friend Carlin was not as yet paid. The demeanour of the students was not improved by the increased rarity of the atmosphere; and they exhibited a lightness and buoyancy of spirit commensurate with the highest elevation. They roared, and swaggered, and embraced, and talked a language in which "*verfluchter Engländer*" occurred pretty often. Considering Crack's knowledge of the language, it is not singular that it was not resented. They grew very bold. Tom's companion, who had lived in half the cheap towns in Germany, declined interpreting.

"No, no!" said that philosopher; "if he gets into a row I must help him out of it, and it will be as well to see whether that's worth while."

A second regalia and more *lieb frau-milch* made it pretty clear to the stranger that Tom was, at least, well to do in the world.

"What's one to do now?" said Crackenthorpe, as the waning daylight warned them to leave the Castle, when it was getting coolish.

"If you want to see a little German life, I think I can take you

to a gasthaus, a sort of Casino, where we shall have some fun. It's a great house for the students, and the lower class of tradesmen take their wives and daughters there. They drink their schoppen of wine and smoke their pipes; and they have music and singing. Not impossible that we may drop in for a dance to-night; Sunday's a great night with them." And they descended the hill.

In one of the narrow streets leading from the one main thoroughfare of which the town consists they found the place they sought. To judge by the noise, the fun was fast and furious; and, by the atmosphere, all Heidelberg must have assembled to do honour to the dissolution of University decorum and restraint. The door kept opening and shutting; loud greetings, mutual embraces, interchanges of beer, and snatches of songs, pervaded the passage; and the brilliant illumination of the whole front to the right of the door gave evidence of the festivity within. As our two Englishmen approached the tumult was hushed, and they were enabled to catch snatches of a grand oration, delivered in student language, in which the practised ear of the Captain (for such was the rank he assumed to himself) detected Prinz Eugène, the juice of the grape, the beauties of the Rhine, and the Zollverein, as the heads of a luminous discourse. Five silbergroschen acted as the "Open sesame" of the inner door, and they found themselves enveloped in impenetrable smoke.

The smoke did not clear off; but when their eyes grew accustomed to it they were able to see. The room was large, the floor sanded. At one end was a raised dais for the musicians, or amateur exhibitors, as in the present case. The place was not inelegantly decorated with flowers and laurel branches; the company was very orderly, but noisy. The landlord, his daughter (a great University beauty), and an assistant or two, continued to bring schoppens of wine and flagons of beer almost without intermission, and every side table was occupied. The centre of the floor was left for the dance, in which, after the late display of oratory, they were about to indulge.

When men have made up their minds to be aggrieved, it does not take long to realize their anticipations. Tom was very soon successful. He and his friend had engaged partners for the next dance—a galop. Tom had selected, with much judgment, considering the amount of smoke, a really good-looking girl. He had commenced operations, and was contemplating a second turn with his partner, when a long-ringleted, moustached student (more of a student, in fact, than most men) proposed to the young lady to take a "tour" with him. As long as a German woman's wind lasts she is good for a galop. So she with a cheerful smile, and he with a profound obeisance to Tom, departed on their voyage.

Tom was too much confounded to speak at first ; but when he did it was in broad Saxon, and a word or two which was perfectly intelligible. Ignorant of German Casino customs, he gave vent to his full-grown wrath, which he had been hatching ever since his arrival. Explanations were unintelligible, and in five minutes Crackenthorpe was in the thick of a very pretty quarrel. They were just short of blows. The women went back to their seats, the men came to the rescue. The stranger Captain elbowed his way up to Tom's side, and Tom squared his shoulders as if he had been backed by the pick of the London fancy.

"Come on," said Tom.

"Hold hard!" said the Captain; "we shall soon get into a row."

"*Ein dummer Engländer*," said the German; "*was macht er denn? Hier, Fritz, you speak English.*"

"Oh! *ja, ja*," said Fritz, who looked just like the other, only he was brown, and the other fair. "*Ja, ja*, I speak Inglis; damn! *Was gibt es?* You is my enemy—I like not dis. My friend is Herr Fabricius. You insult my friend. My friend say you are a stupid younker. There, now you understand, *Donnerwetter!*"

"Here, tell him, please, what I mean, in German," said Tom, "if you understand English. Tell him he's an impertinent snob, and if the women were not in the room I'd give him an infernal licking at once."

The interpreter stared, and Tom doubled his fists unmistakably.

The Captain interposed: "You tell me the German for 'black-guard,' if you please, or call him one in my name; and make the interpreter understand that if he'll come out I'll break his neck as well as his friend's."

Here the press got greater, and the majority, who all yelled at once, seemed to be getting the best of it. The landlord tried his oratory in three languages: none of them were listened to. Tom made use of his vernacular, the students of theirs, and the Captain appealed alternately to both. A gentleman, a little the *better* for beer, commenced personalities by attempting to remove Tom's hat, which in his wrath he had put on. He was saluted by a clean left-hander, which sent him flying back into the arms of his friends. Then the battle raged furiously: a simultaneous attack was made upon Tom, and, overpowered by numbers, he must have succumbed. Sticks began to appear above the heads of the combatants; the women left the room in dismay; and the end must have been to Tom ignominious retreat or certain death. But he was seconded by a good man. If the Captain could do nothing else, he could fight; and the two, with their backs to the wall,

had scarcely got a blow, whilst the invaders were only coming up to be knocked down. However, numbers will tell, and were just beginning to assert their value, when the door opened, and a fresh arrival proclaimed a reinforcement for one side or the other. It was not long before it was decided on which: the ring opened—in a moment affairs assumed a different phase, for a ready delivery by Bobby Munster rolled back the tide of war.

He was accompanied by the very worst-looking bull-terrier that has ever been seen—the ugliest and most bandy-legged. For a moment, as silence ensued, he stood still, ruefully regarding the combatants. The movements, however, began again: again the fallen champion arose; again the crowd pushed on: he could stand no more, but making a grab at the nearest opposition pair of breeches, as their owner turned to fly he caught hold of something more substantial than cloth. An Englishman is bad enough, but an Englishman and his *boule-dogge* is the very devil. The captive halloed, the crowd retreated one upon the other, the dog held on. “Don’t dance,” said Cracks. “Tell him to stand still,” said Bob, “or he’ll eat him.” “*Sei ruhig*,” said the Captain, “*bewegen Sie sich nicht*”—don’t stir, and we’ll get him off for you; and with some difficulty having made themselves intelligible, and having got the room to themselves, they proceeded to release the only remaining opponent.

“There, now, sit down,” said Crackenthorpe good-naturedly, beginning to tend the sufferer with as much care as though they had been brothers; “sit down.”

“He won’t sit down this side of Christmas,” said the anonymous Captain in a dogmatic manner. “There’ll be a shindy tomorrow; however, it can’t be helped. Who’s your friend with the dog?”

“Oh! I beg your pardon, Munster; let me introduce you. Captain—ah—ah—Captain”——

“Stuart,” said the anonymous gentleman.

“Captain Stuart, Mr. Munster. How in the world did you come here?”

“Quite accidentally. The shooting was too bad for anything. I thought horse-whipping old Cutpurse and paying the damages preferable: I called in town, but he was washing himself at Margate. The governor came down handsomely with a couple of hundred, and I thought I’d follow you. I saw your name in the visitors’ book at the ‘Prinz Karl,’ and took a stroll with Billy the Beau. We heard a tremendous shindy here, and turned in. Isn’t he a neat ’un?”

Bob, we know, had a turn for something neat in the dog line. The Beau was the most hideous brute in creation, horribly under-jawed, and his nose and face wrinkled all over as if he had been

tattooed. He was to the dog-kind what the South Sea Islander is to his fellow-man. He looked at Bob and his friends, and licked his lips unctiously after his last morsel, at the same time rejecting some fragments of cloth.

By degrees the landlord, the landlady, the daughter, the waiter, and two or three more looked in. The wounded man craved the assistance of the ladies, which was gracefully accorded without any inquiry as to the nature of his wound. Tom, the Captain, Munster, and the Beau were regarded with considerable terror; by means of the Captain it was intimated to them that they might go, and the order was confirmed by two gentlemen in uniform outside. They were for taking forcible possession of the Beau, but thought better of it on seeing his under teeth. They were escorted to their hotel by a guard of honour, and promised an introduction the next morning to the first magistrate of the town.



## CHAPTER XVII.

TOM'S INTERESTS ARE WATCHED OVER IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE.

JUSTICE, according to Crackenthorpe and his friends, is exceedingly blind at Heidelberg. Doubtless the dingy, smoke-dried old *juge de paix* failed to see that knocking a hat off in the case of a student is an assault, but that knocking down the aggressor, in the case of an Englishman, is highly reprehensible. Bobby Munster and the Captain were manifestly in the wrong in aiding and defending their countryman; but the bravery of the Burschenschaft, who came to the rescue of their brethren in the number of about twelve to one, was an exhibition of patriotism beyond all praise or punishment. The dog was condemned to death unheard, although his master kindly proposed bringing him face to face with the judge and accusers. "*Mersa puppis*," his *bark* was drowned, as Tom observed. The police, when ordered to carry the sentence into execution, found him in the landlady's lap, with whom he was on the most intimate terms. He declined to come out; she declined to dismiss him; and the boldest of the Heidelberger Badische Cavalry was afraid to remove him. He could not be shot without some danger to the landlady in his present position, and it gave time for a compromise. The rest of

the conspirators were dangling between the fortress at Bruchsal and a heavy fine when an opportune arrival saved them.

The Baron von Weissvogel was superintendent of the railway, ex-officer of the late Grand Duchess Stephanie's Bodyguard, wore a long sword and very long moustache, and was altogether a very happy specimen of a late blue-and-silver dragoon. He had married two wives, both Englishwomen, who had brought him a few thousand thalers each, was a professed admirer of our countrymen and women, and acted on all occasions as a *προξενος* for our nation.

The name of the consul went for nothing; the strenuous efforts of Captain Stuart to make himself understood, and his threats of British interference, were unavailing; things were assuming their blackest aspect; all the students were speaking at once; and the seat of the trousers—or, I should say, the place where it once was—was being exhibited, at which the ladies present cried "Shame," when the clatter of spurs and a very military footfall was heard, and the Baron von Weissvogel came to the front.

The Baron winked at the Judge; and a more impressive wink can scarcely be conceived. It first stopped, and then turned, the whole current of judicial oratory. Within half an hour it was discovered that Cracks and Company were strangers to the usages of the Electorate; that the students were excited by the exceptional circumstances of the case; that both parties were right—the English rather more right than the rest; they were all to embrace, which they did not; the bull-dog, like another great amateur, was to be honoured with a public banquet and collar of the Saxony fleece; and the Baron, and the Judge, Crackenthorpe, Munster, and the Captain, adjourned to the "Prinz Karl," and finished several bottles of Rhenish to their better acquaintance, and to the purity of the administration of German justice.

Within three weeks the Baron von Weissvogel married a third wife; and this time it was a German. She was the portionless daughter of the *juge de paix*.

In the meantime Lushenham was alive. It dragged on an existence considerably more exciting than heretofore. The Box, as it was facetiously called, progressed. The widow herself was here, there, and everywhere. First at the Rectory; then at Farmer Muckleprong's—who was to her establishment a sort of right-hand man, and winked and nodded whenever her name was mentioned; and then at the Sunday-school, where she gave away sixpences to her class, and struggled with some difficulty through the Catechism.

"That's awful work, mother. I never shall get through that part of the play."

"Nonsense, Kitty—Lilian, I mean; that's the very most

necessary bit of all. All the ladies in these parts teach the poor children; at least wherever the curate is a single man. I recollect the Squire's daughters at Downies. Bless me! how particular they were about their bonnet on Sunday afternoon; they thought a deal more of it than about going to church. To be sure one couldn't see much of 'em there, in that well of a pew, and the reading-desk was on the other side."

"That's all very well for them, Mrs. Bransby; but I don't want to marry the curate, nor to stand in Mrs. Partington's shoes. It's uncommonly tiring work, being so good. I don't think Daniel's worth the trouble."

"But what a thing it is to have the parson on your side!" said the old lady, looking as if she fully appreciated the appearance of respectability, however indifferent to the reality. "Besides, you see all the neighbours there; and it's quite as well to have made a nest before you begin to sit."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, mother," said the younger lady, who was not wanting in worldly wisdom either, and who was not of so sanguine a temperament as the other. "First, the gentleman's not come, and there's many a slip between the cup and the lip." Here the widow pouted. "And then there's the Miss Partingtons, and Miss Gladwish, and—and—who's that woman that's been looking over the cottage, and ordering this thing and that thing? She was there last week."

"Lor' bless ye! child, it was only his mother."

"Was it? Well, I don't like mothers. They're very wide awake, you know. You are, Mrs. Bransby, yourself. I don't quite understand that Emily Gladwish either. I can't make friends with her; and she'd be a bad enemy."

"She's very fond of that old father of hers; make friends with him if you can. I never saw the man you couldn't manage yet. The girl will come after."

Here the dialogue closed. Mrs. Greystoke went for a ride, and her mother to sleep.

"I've seen her! I've seen her!" said Partington one day, making his way into his own drawing-room through lace flounces and tarlataue, in preparation for Mrs. Gaddington's school-feast. September was drawing to a close.

"Seen what, Daniel? what can you mean?" said the Vicar's wife in astonishment, whose mind was at that time dwelling on the widow Greystoke.

"Why, Mrs. Crackenthorpe, to be sure! She's been at the château, and chosen her room, and arranged the garden, and ordered a work-table. I told you he was married; and now the girls have got those new capes for the winter, and I've gone and



ordered a new side-saddle for old Golumpus. I wish I'd made some inquiries beforehand." Here he groaned aloud.

"Married! Nonsense, Daniel! Young men are not in such a hurry to be married now-a-days. Perhaps it would be quite as well if he was."



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### NEWS.

THERE can be no doubt that the Rev. Daniel Partington was right this time. There was a lady looking pretty sharply after the interests of the Box and its tenant. She was neither very young nor very fair, but she was quite good-looking enough to excite some unpleasant rumours in Lushenham. She seemed to come with a sort of authority too. She was mighty particular about a certain little boudoir, and desired the groom, who had at last made the stables ship-shape, and was grooming Acheron, to move her brougham out of that nasty damp place, into the other coach-house. It was done at once. She nodded her feathers with a satisfied look, and ordered some fires to be kept up in the other rooms.

She never went to church, though there was a bed for her to sleep in; and altogether excited considerable speculation in the village. Her bonnets were so pretty, and her dressing so good, that Matilda and Josephine were dying of jealousy. Mrs. Partington thought that all women to be respectable should be moderately fat and moderately ugly. The widow was not uneasy, as Mrs. Bransby had enlightened her as to the probable relationship of the parties; and Daniel, having satisfied himself that "Mrs. Crackenthorpe" meant anything but Mrs. Crackenthorpe, was furious for the honour of his parish. It never occurred to him that Tom might have had a mother.

I said that Emily Gladwish had a father. He was a good-looking, hale man, confined to his chair by an accident some years back whilst hunting in Ireland. There was nothing beyond this remarkable about him, but having been a thorough sportsman, and much in the world, his inability to enjoy his former pleasures

made him irritable. Irritability in a healthy cripple is certainly excusable. Some losses and the necessary sale of his commission had rather straightened his circumstances. He lived at Lushenham to be nearer the little property which belonged to him, and which fully sufficed for the wants of himself, his daughter, and his favourite pony Moonshee. He believed nothing equal to the two last. He had a cheerful acquaintance in the neighbourhood, and his greatest pleasure was the Irish melodies as sung by his daughter, and an account of a run as described by a friend.

To him the widow Lilian Greystoke determined upon laying siege. Her particular design was unknown to herself. As to marrying a man old enough to be her father, with a small income and a grown-up daughter, that was impossible. Perhaps she determined upon keeping her hand in—though I take flirtation to be, like swimming, or shooting, or skating, and one or two other feminine exercises, very easily resumed, so long as the practitioner has once been an adept. Or was it that she really wished to conciliate Emily Gladwish through her father? Women easily mistrust one another. They are very quick in detecting antipathy, and not very slow in showing it. But Mrs. Bransby's orders were to be friends with the whole world. She expected the mammon of unrighteousness to shelter her when she should be turned out into the world, with nothing but her character to command respect. So the widow set to work to do her behest; and, all things considered, with tolerable success.

"Greystoke, my dear? Not I; how should I know her?" said Captain Gladwish to his daughter. "What made you think that?"

"I'm sure I've seen her, some years back. You know, dear papa, I never forget faces. I can't think where it was."

"Oh! one might have seen her anywhere. Dare say I have. She seems very pleasant and amiable. You're prejudiced, Emmy."

"I like her much better than I did, but I can't get over the curious—curious—you know what I mean, papa."

"Of course I do—prejudice, that's the word; nothing else in the world."

"But the Vicar's wife has the same sort of feeling about her."

"Then the Vicar's wife is a bigger fool than the Vicar, and that's saying a great deal. It's all prejudice. Women never do like pretty women."

"And men always do. My dear papa, she has some object in coming here, and talking about hunting, because she knows you like it."

"Of course she has: it is because I like it; and very kind it is of her. Have you seen the Partingtons lately?"

"Yesterday."

His daughter said no more, for she thought him getting irritable; and when he was, he was apt to be crude in his remarks.

"And is the old grey to be put into condition for Miss Josephine?"

"The Vicar is not so anxious about it as he was."

This was a mild form of negation; and Captain Gladwish knew it.

"Given it up, in fact?" said he, pressing the point.

"I think he has; but I really haven't asked him."

"And what does Miss Josephine say about it herself?"

"I haven't asked her; but I don't think she seems much disappointed."

"How's that? I thought it was all arranged that she was to fall at an early opportunity, the first month of the season."

"Papa!"

"Which she very well might do, on the grey, before that time;—that it was to be close to Mr. Crackenthorpe; that he was to be found kneeling over her, bathing her blue eyes, which were to be keeping a look-out through the lashes."

"Papa!"

"Until her cousin, young Muggs—the big Bashi-bazouk sort of fellow, who is to be down here for the occasion on one of Spavin's screws—"

"Papa, dear, who could have—"

"Why, Partington and his wife, to be sure. That's the arrangement, isn't it, Emmy? I suppose the Vicar's wife thinks Mrs. Greystoke might prove a stumbling-block to her imaginations, so she hasn't fallen in love with the widow. How is it none of them are afraid of you?"

"We're such quiet people."

"The silent—hem!—I beg your pardon—'Still water'—you know the rest."

"Do you remember being at Salzburg, about four years back, when we were travelling for—for—" said Emily Gladwish, changing the subject.

"Yes, dear girl; don't be afraid to say it out—with the hope of restoring my shattered frame to something like vigour."

A little, very little blush passed over the Captain's countenance, and Emily got up, went to her father's chair, and put her arms round his neck.

"It was thoughtless and unkind to remind you of it," said she, as she kissed his cheek.

"I'm reminded of it every day, Emmy, and I'll tell you how: by the thousand little offices of love and attention which I receive from you. They would be very dearly purchased even by many

a day's hunting and shooting; and it's selfish of me sometimes to regret their loss."

Captain Gladwish was not a bad fellow altogether, you see; but he loved a little self-martyrdom and its concomitant demonstrations of affection.

"You have made a conquest of the widow yourself, my dear papa," said Miss Gladwish, resuming her seat: "she has been out cub-hunting to-day, and she's coming in this evening to tell you all about it."

"I feel very much flattered, I'm sure."

"And so you ought. And now we'll ring for your coffee, if you like, as you seem to have finished your allowance of sherry; or the widow will be here before you're quite ready for her."

And Emily rang the bell accordingly.

And then the widow came. She looked wonderfully well by candle-light. She was of an age, indeed, when something undefined became her best—half-colours, lace, bonnet-strings, and artificial light; not but that she looked remarkably well in the most definite of all costumes—a habit and a hat. But everybody knows that a crisp, distinct style of dressing—tight collars, and stiff wrists, and a marked colour or pattern—wants youth, clearness of complexion, and the preserved outline of feature; indications of a capability to run into temptation. The widow's was a well-preserved thirty. It required a style of its own; the rounded, the easy, the luxurious; all curves, and fullness, and softness; no outlines at all, no colour, no decision, except of character. She preferred an arm-chair to a straight-backed one; and did not care to exhibit her uprightness, save on horseback. All her postures were in curves, and her characteristics were of the *omelette soufflée* kind.

She came alone. She had an instinctive idea that what might be very well at the Vicarage would not be so acceptable at "The Vine" cottage; that the parson of the parish, after all that education had done for him, was not quite such a gentleman as the ex-dragon. One of these things was a "vulgar mamma." Mrs. Bransby was nothing very much out of the way at Lushenham Parsonage: probably half the mammas in that family were not unlike her; but she was quite sure that neither Captain Gladwish nor Emily was accustomed to them. So she came alone—as she said, not to see the Captain.

She had determined, too, to be friends with Emily; first, because she felt that Emily was not very well disposed towards her, for some reason or other; secondly, it was her policy to make herself universally popular, knowing that it is almost as difficult to get rid of a friend as to make one; thirdly, because she was a good-natured woman and no one that knew Emily

Gladwish long could help liking her; and, lastly, for some indefinite reason, on which she had no time to speculate at present.

Permit me, in spite of the critics, to explain a little what Mrs. Greystoke was. She was not an "Anonyma," nor a "pretty horsebreaker," nor any one of those very curious things which seem to be talked about in a language which has no advantage beyond concealing vice, and which affords an opportunity for women to talk on subjects which ought to be a closed book to the mothers and daughters of England. "Slang" is bad enough; "pace" is almost disreputable in a woman; but it is a thousand times better that they should call certain things and persons by their right names, than that they should gloss over startling vices by employing wrong terms. Mrs. Greystoke was not an Anonyma, nor a pretty horsebreaker, but an adventuress. Of course we shall see of what sort.

"Now, Captain Gladwish, I didn't come to see you," said she, nevertheless drawing her chair close to his *fauteuil*, or semi-reclining couch. "I came to see Miss Gladwish, and to see if I could help her to entertain you."

"Ah! then you did come to see me, Mrs. Greystoke, after all? I feel much flattered by your attention. So you have been out this morning?"

"Yes, and had some sport; I was glad of a ride in this country before the regular season begins. The fences were too blind to trust this morning, so I didn't do more than canter from cover to cover. We killed two foxes—a brace, I am told to call them, if I would be correct; but I really know very little about it."

"Then you've a natural taste for it, or you surely would not have buried yourself in Lushenham." Here the Captain seems to have shut his eyes, and hit rather straighter and harder than he intended.

"Taste! Captain Gladwish, it's a passion. I can't live without horse exercise, and of a violent sort. Indeed, I might almost say, I am ordered to hunt." She meant, of course, by her own instincts. "And you, I hear from our neighbours, used to be so fond of it."

The Captain winced a little, and then replied, "Excessively."

"And how sad to be deprived of such a pleasure!" She saw something in his face which warned her against pursuing the subject, as he replied:

"We learn to put up with almost any affliction, when once incurable." Upon which she turned the subject into a new channel somewhat abruptly.

"Do you know our intended neighbour?"

Captain Gladwish did not answer at once. Either he was thinking over his own last words, or wondering whom she meant, so Emily Gladwish interfered.

"Do you mean the Broadlands people, Mrs. Greystoke?"

"No! I mean my neighbour and yours, who has taken the house known as Simcox Farm."

Emily blushed as she recalled the lady whom her friends the Partingtons declared to be no better than she should be.

"I mean Mr. Crackenthorpe; he's not come back yet; but I suppose we may expect him immediately."

As it turned out to be Mr. Crackenthorpe of whom Mrs. Greystoke was speaking, Emily's blushes increased. In the present state of the village, the man's name sounded less delicate than that of the woman.

"We hear no news, Mrs. Greystoke," said Captain Gladwish: "but I believe he's a very good sort of young man; plenty of money, and fond of sport."

This is not an uncommon idea of a good sort of young man, by the way; and probably quite as just as most.

"Oh! yes, very rich; a charming *parti*, Miss Gladwish." Emily smiled. "And likely to be very *recherché* in Lushenham and the neighbourhood. Besides which, Bachelor's Hall, or the Farm, or whatever is the real name of the place, is sure to be full of company; that is, of young men. They've always a hanger-on, or a friend, and no end of acquaintance."

"And is there much difference between the two in such a case?"

"Yes! The acquaintances ride their own horses, and the friend rides the stud."

"That's a very striking difference, Emily, I can tell you," rejoined the Captain. "There's no truer friend in the world than the man that will mount you over such a country as this. It shows the highest confidence in you; not in your honesty, but in your capability—a much rarer quality." Captain Gladwish asked if he might smoke; it was a bad habit, but as an invalid he had been accustomed to it, and he did know ladies who did not object.

"Object?" Mrs. Greystoke preferred it to anything; wished she could smoke herself, she was so fond of the smell. And then they went on talking on indifferent subjects, chiefly connected with horseflesh and hounds; and Emily and her father both thought the widow a very good companion, and very lady-like person. Still Emily wondered where she could have seen her before.

At that moment the door opened, and a sharp-nosed, straight-haired, dark-complexioned head came in. It was about to bolt back again, but halted at a signal from Captain Gladwish. "Come in,

Partington; come in, man—only our friend Mrs. Greystoke; come, sit down;” and the Vicar stole back, and, after his head, introduced his whole body.

There was no subject on which they were talking on which the Rev. Daniel Partington could not throw some light; and when they got to Tom Crackenthorpe he was like a Bude. They thought he would shortly be back.

“Oh! dear no; certainly not—certainly not; quite positive; very likely not come at all. Horses going to Germany, or to Tattersall’s; outrun the constable sadly. Heard it all; saw the postman this morning, and the outside of the letter: and the stud-groom this afternoon. One of the horses gone up to town already to be shipped, and more to follow to-morrow.”

“Bless my heart!” thought the widow; though she did not say so. She pressed her hand, however, to that region to see that it was all right; and found it so. The intelligence might be true after all, and then—Ah! then. What a state the Partingtons would be in! As to getting on cheerfully after this announcement, that was impossible. Even the Captain seemed sorry for the loss of a presumed companion, who must have been better than the Vicar himself. Partington had endeavoured to conceal his chagrin, by announcing his own defeat, with what success may be better imagined than described; and Mrs. Greystoke, though doubtful of the truth of this intelligence, determined upon looking after the rumour in the morning. Emily Gladwish alone expressed her regret, which was sincere. She longed for some one in the winter to come in and cheer her father, smoke a cigar with him, and detail the runs and the catastrophes of the day. He was so hard to get out to dinner, from his infirmity, and he had no one within two or three miles who could be expected to be so scolding as to pass a winter’s evening with the sufferer. At an early hour the Vicar, proud of his charge, under shadow of the night, escorted Mrs. Greystoke to her own home. She apologised for not asking him in: her mother was an early person—not very well. So he took leave of her at the door. He was a shortsighted person, and said nothing to his wife about his walk. It came out afterwards, and then he had some explanation due to Mrs. Partington, for having forgotten to mention it. This grim female hated the widow more.

The invalided Mrs. Bransby was engaged in a hot jorum of rum-punch, which she finished before retiring for the night; and Mrs. Greystoke helped her.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## WIESBADEN.

TOM CRACKENTHORPE, Robert Munster, and the newly discovered Captain Stuart had established their reputation in Heidelberg. They continued to enjoy it, by eating, drinking, and smoking in the most formidable manner, to the delight of the hotel-keepers and the horror of the pious inhabitants, who regarded the English, *en masse*, as participants in their wickedness. The Baron von Weissvogel, I am sorry to say, encouraged them in their proceedings, and not unfrequently joined them at the expense of his friend von Crackendorf. Indeed, that distinguished Britisher was so accustomed to pay for everybody and everything, that he probably felt no uneasiness from it till he found himself a little short of money. Such a thing is not difficult to remedy when there are funds in reserve. So Tom informed his friend Stuart of his temporary difficulties, with a request to know how to get out of them. It is but right to say that the Captain looked with a little suspicion on this early application, not being clear whether it was to be a loan, under the semblance of kite-flying, or whether it was merely a momentary embarrassment until he could send to England. Before entering into the negotiation himself, he resolved to ask the question, and received a most satisfactory answer.

"Money! bless your soul! no. I don't want money, excepting for the moment. I want to go to Wiesbaden; and I want a hundred pounds before I go, which I can't get under a week, if I write to-day. I want to borrow it. I'll pay for it."

"I know a Jew here who sometimes accommodates us: I'll see him to-morrow," said his new ally.

"Now, Schenkengelt, you rascal! how are we to settle this little matter? Be quick, or I shall try Feuerstein. We want to go to-day."

"Feuerstein, eh? *Gott bewahr!* he has not got von hundred pounds. But, I tell you vot I shall do: I shall take ten per shent.—that is he shall have ninety pounds; and he shall give me his note of hand now. Is dad good?"

"And what shall I have? half—?"

"I tell you Mr. Stuart, you shall have—let me see, you owe me five pounds! You shall pay me two pounds and a half, and I shall sign you a *quittung*."



"And where am I to get the two pounds and a half, as you call it?"

"You shall borrow it of your friend, who gets the ninety."

"And that's your idea of ten per cent.," said Stuart, who was much too great an adept to be done without seeing it. "Mr. Crackenthorpe is to pay you in one week, and you are to have ten pounds: that's five hundred and twenty per cent. Do you know what a *spitzbube* is?"

"Oh, yes; I've seen 'em in all countries. It gives also English *spitzbubes*."

This was so home a thrust, that Stuart came to a compromise, by receiving a quittance for his five pound debt, and carried home to Tom Crackenthorpe a heterogeneous mass of all sorts of moneys, which took him three hours to count; and then seemed to be short, by about thirty thalers.

Wiesbaden is a small place in the mountains, where foul water, luxuriant foliage, a prince's hunting-lodge, fine scenery, infirmities, and *rouge et noir*, meet together. Thither, after discharging a bill which included almost everything at the "Prinz Karl," our three friends adjourned. They got rooms which looked into a courtyard full of remises, German post-boys, and blouses, waiting to be engaged. If I say they were over the public kitchen of the "Hotel Schwarzenburg," I have said enough in favour of their warmth: the particular object of our friends seemed to be eating, as any notion of infirmity on the part of any one of them was absurd. Munster proposed to rise early, and to walk up and down for two hours, listening to a brass band, and drinking foul water out of an eight-ounce tumbler to the tune of slow music; and Tom was for making inquiry after a *chasse au sanglier*, or pig hunt, as he profanely called it. Captain Stuart had succeeded in borrowing twenty pounds of the hundred, until he should receive his remittances (an indefinite period of repayment), and was busied with a curious card and a pin for a considerable length of time after breakfast, when he adjourned to the Kursaal. But Munster was too sleepy when the time came: the pigs were the particular property of the Grand Duke of Wiesbadenhausen, and were not in season; and the Captain was the only one who seemed likely to pursue any object but that of gastronomy. Wiesbaden was as stupid as could be during the day.

The evening shone upon better things. They went to the rooms. All was light, bright, feverish, inside; cool, watery, scent-bearing without. Tom and his friends tried the inside first.

The hock and champagne had been good at dinner, the latter *bien frappé*, and as ill-luck would have it, their money was in florins and napoleons, loose in their breeches pockets. There were Jews, Spaniards, Russians, infidels, and heretics around

them: and women whose necks and fingers glittered with stones as hard as their hearts. They sat them down to play daily, nightly, and rose up again to mourn. They were all cleared out and went away. Some ruined, some to refit, some to economize, and one or two to die. All but one jolly little Spaniard, who broke the bank twice, and walked about as gloomily as a sandboy's donkey (it is not a happy animal, believe me), jingling 30,000 francs in his pockets.

Our friends did the same; and when they had lost all their ready money, they gave it up, with saddened hearts that there was no more to lose.

Then they heard of a steeplechase—a steeplechase to be—in Germany.

“We'll get back our money,” said Tom.

“Where's the horse?” said Captain Stuart.

“And where's a fresh relay of rouleaux?” said Bobby.

“I'll order some more,” said the good-natured Cracks, “and we'll have over Blue Peter, who won so well at Pumpington last year, and we'll give these foreigneering gentlemen a turn; if we don't, why—blow me!”

And he sent for Blue Peter, which accounts for the lying of the postman and the Rev. the Vicar at Lushenham, and we shall see whether he gave the foreigneering gentlemen a turn, before he got back to the Box, and the pretty widow—blow me!



## CHAPTER XX.

### BLUE PETER IS HOISTED.

WHILST our two friends were enjoying themselves with an *al fresco* sort of life at Wiesbaden, and plunging deeper into the mysteries of *trente et quarante* and *roulette* as long as Tom Crackenthorpe found supplies, Lushenham was startled by the surmises of the Vicar in favour of the total bankruptcy of that young man. The only ground on which he based his little innuendoes was the removal of a couple of horses at the very time that their master should have been strengthening his stud. Not that any one would have believed the reverend gentleman, who was remarkable

as a gossip; but people are always jumping to conclusions which are opposed to their own wishes. This arises from a laudable desire to take off the first edge of disappointment. It is clear that the expectation of a gallant Lothario, with an establishment of servants, horses, and hangers-on of all kinds, must be a most acceptable addition to Lushenham village. The château had already risen from its degradation as a farm-house into a comfortable hunting-box; and the old cowsheds and rough cart-stables had become, under the fostering hands of a mediæval bricklayer, very respectable quarters for a more ambitious animal.

All the women of course, were disposed to regret any change of plan which should delay the gratification of their curiosity. Amongst the numbers that might naturally be expected, it was very odd if some Jack were not found for every Jenny. The housemaids, cooks, young ladies'-maids, nurse-maids, and scullery-maids, imagined some corresponding piece of furniture in a bachelor's house. The ladies of the village, few in number, appropriated a first-class visitor each to herself. And the tapsters, publicans, butchers, bakers, and robbers of every kind and degree, knew quite enough about such matters to assure themselves that a golden age of perquisites, over-charges, under-weights, discounts, and double-payments, was about to commence with the new reign of King Crackenthorpe.

"What?" said Jobkins, the little saddler, a trifle dearer than Merry or Gordon—"a young gent with nigh ten thousand a-year? Lor! what feathers he must have, to line other people's nestesses with, to be sure!"

One person was exceedingly put out at Lushenham, and that was Billy Drinkwater. I think, with great reason.

Billy Drinkwater was a character. He had lived with his present master ever since his Christchurch career; indeed, it is said that that respectable young man was himself busily engaged in the painting and daubing line, which had something to do with the suspension of Tom's studies; at all events, he ruined the paint. He was a short, bow-legged, red-faced individual, with a very *prononce* sort of nose, which he blew with portentous blast whenever he was put out. But whether this was to gain time for the recovery of his temper before going to action, or to take measures for out-manceuvring his adversary, I can't say. He was a sublime hater of all foreigners, and everything connected with them. He regarded them as simple sharks—sent on earth, much as the more ferocious or predatory animals, for the destruction of hosts of minor sharpers and swindlers, who might otherwise have overrun the world; and in their turn to be trodden out, as opportunity might occur, by an avenging Providence, which he called "Briton." He had a decidedly bad opinion of women,

too. Nothing alarmed him more than the possibility of Tom's falling a victim to the tender passion. He had himself suffered from the inconstancy of *the sex* in early life. We cannot wonder, then, that the orders to bring Blue Peter *viâ* Cologne to Wiesbaden should have rather upset a delicate temper. However, there was nothing else to be done; and, as in all cases, there were one or two consolatory reflections. He would go himself, much as he detested all "foreignneering and outlandish doings," to care of master, who was clearly getting into the hands of the Philistines. He would take the horse; for, notwithstanding a rather short preparation, and a sea-voyage into the bargain, "blow'd if he couldn't beat them foreigneerin' beggars on brewers' grains, upon three legs." The hope of taking in the sharks was a fund of consolation in the midst of his distresses. Behold, then, one fine morning, Billy Drinkwater with Blue Peter, ready for a start, the cynosure of all eyes at the Catherine Docks, where his own legs and his horse's were the subject of discussion to an idle but eloquent audience.

"My lies, Jim! there's legs: ain't a bad-shaped old screw, neither; where's he a-goin' to?"

"Emp'rour of Prussia, I should think—only there ain't no crown on the clothin' Always has a heagle or a crown, mostly both," says Jim.

"Why so—what's that for?"

"Cos he's a himperial bird, you know. Lord! if he ain't had the hirsns, to be sure. What a cripple it is!"

Billy Drinkwater stopped short, looked defiance at the two speakers, pulled out his handkerchief, and blew a terrific blast.

"Now, young Saucebox, let's have none of your impertinence: what have you got to do with *my* horse's legs?"

Here Billy twisted his nose importantly.

"Who said anything about the 'oss's legs?"

"Why, you did; and don't do it again."

"No, I didn't. Just ask Jim if I did." Here the lad pretended penitence.

"Well, then," said Billy, slightly mollified, "what was you talking about?"

"Why, your own, stoopid, to be sure." And, whilst the youngster slipped behind a cab, Billy and his horse were urged forward by the increasing crowd towards the wharf.

As there was nothing more to be done, and but little more to be said, he proceeded to hoist *his Blue Peter*; and without any other *contretemps* than that of putting his hind-leg through a bonnet-box, which Billy rather liked, as it belonged to a woman (most bonnets do), and could be easily replaced at about one pound fifteen, they set sail.

It was a warm, sunshiny afternoon in October. We get those sort of days on the Continent, when our own climate is all rain, or blight, or easterly wind, and when one shivers up and down the garden in a pea-jacket, should it be necessary to remove your post-prandial cigar from your dining-room fireside. There were still half a dozen tables laid on the terrace, outside of the *Speise-Saal*; there were the flowers still trailing their long tendrils above and around; there was still the light, laughing chorus of half a dozen representatives of *la jeune France* and *Les Variétés*, picking the bones off each other's plates, and toasting each other in bumpers of champagne; and there were still our friends Crackenthorpe, Munster, and their new acquaintance, Captain Stuart, lounging away their time, and criticising Made-moiselle Adèle and Fräulein Malchen, and eyeing the scandalous proceedings of the young Baron de la Roche de Stuffenfelsen, who was scarcely conscious that the public gardens could belong to anyone but himself and his friends. Within a very few minutes they were joined by Weissvogel, and soon Herr Rittmeister von Choucroute, who was considered one of the most sporting men on the German side of the Rhine.

Stuart was very useful to our hero, it cannot be denied. He was a tolerably good companion at all times; never out of temper; ready to eat anything at any hour, dirt included; had some valuable information always ready on German horseflesh; and was public interpreter, without which no young man should be trusted alone on the Continent, unless he be thoroughly conversant with the language. It has been my fate to see my countrymen sent to all places but the right; shunted here, there, and everywhere, and eventually lodged in a police-office, for want of a little of the national vernacular. I have seen them paying four times the value of a bottle of ordinary Rhine wine, and calling it cheap, under the genuine name of "Hock." I have seen them insulted, and offering insults to others; disobedient to authority, or so impertinently handled themselves, that it was more than British blood could stand. I have heard them talking about the Consul, and the British Embassy, and the Horse Guards, and the *Times* newspaper (that awful institution), and threatening condign punishment to half the hotels in Germany, in a language utterly incomprehensible. And all this for want of a little perseverance, or the merest rudiments of a modern gentleman's education. All such inconveniences their new acquaintance saved them. Just now he was worth his salt and something more. It will save trouble if I tell the reader that all hitches in the conversation were supplied by the timely assistance of Stuart, who called French, German, and English into the market, for the proper exchange of mutual sentiment.

"Ah! Weissvogel. How do, Rittmeister?" These old acquaintances had come from the Cavalry quarters at Mannheim, to be in attendance upon so splendid a patron of sport of all kind as Knaves.

"Just in time for dinner. What wine shall we drink, Baron?"

"By all means, of the best — Marcobrunner '34," said von Weissvogel, in a curious language of his own.

"What do you say to a bottle of Steinwein, Herr Rittmeister? — and, Jasen, put some Champagne in ice. Ah! here comes the dinner." And soon the two barons were hard at work with their knives and forks, but especially with their knives.

"Ask him what horses are going for the steeplechase, Stuart. They say there's an animal that was brought from England, a thoroughbred one, that's to cut down everything; see what you can make of it. His English is almost as bad as my German." The question was asked.

"Yes, yes! I know," said the Rittmeister; "he means Grabuge. He is an excellent horse; he carries 90 kilogrammes. I remember me his colours, *marron et rouge, tête noire*. He is a fine *schimmel pferd*; and shall win." Here the Rittmeister wiped his knife on his bread, and swallowed a corner. "But you have a horse, Crackendorf, my friend?"

"Oh! ah! yes," said Cracks, as if he had almost forgotten his existence. "He ought to be here. He's no use against your favourite, Crablouse, or whatever his name is."

"No! no! that a pity. Shall we drink to his health? He will be second; that is something: *il recevra les entrées*; that is also something." Here the Rittmeister filled bumpers all round.

"Von Weissvogel, shall we smoke? Take a cigar; and you, von Choucroute," added Munster, "try one of mine. How is our old friend the Burgomeister, or Juge de Paix?"

"Ah! you mean my excellent father-in-law that is to be. For a father-in-law, who retains the money in his own hands, he is always too well. We can but hope, if he is spared much longer, that it may be to make some more. Providence is good; but I cannot tell." The Baron sighed, and emitted a volume of smoke.

Here a waiter appeared, and told Crackenthorpe that a person arrived from England required to see him at once.

"What's he like, Kellner? Ask him in German, Stuart."

"He says he's short, crooked-legged, straight-haired, and red-nosed."

"That's Billy Drinkwater, then, Bob. I must go to him for a minute or two, and then I'll be back," and Crackenthorpe went out. He was not long in finding Billy, who was wofully put out; first, because he couldn't make himself intelligible for the last

three hours; secondly, because not only the landlord, but his wife and daughters, and half the house, had insisted on seeing the English horse on its arrival—a thing so subversive of Billy's ideas of right, that you would have thought that evil eyes were the rule of the hotel to which his master had attached himself.

"Well, never mind, Drinkwater; it don't much signify here, as long as he's all right after the journey. He fed well, eh? They won't hurt him."

"No," said Billy, "I'll engage they don't; but, lord! sir, you're so unsuspicious. I'm blowed if they wouldn't have physicked him then and there, only somehow he laid hold on one on 'em just above the elbow; and didn't he shake him just!" Here Billy smiled, cheerfully.

"Why the deuce didn't you tell 'em to take care?"

"So I did, in English. It's my opinion they can't understand any language 'cepting their own, ignorant brutes! All as I could get at first was a great lump o' black bread, which they call 'futter.'"

"Any news from Lushenham?" said Tom.

"Missus came in just as I went out. The rooms is ready; they let in the water, they do tell me; but the stables are all right, and that's the great thing. To be sure, the parlour do smoke uncommon."

"That's bad," said Tom; "however, we must look to it next month. Anything else? Anybody been at the place?"

"Yes, good many, mostly women. They keep up a great interest in you, comin' and goin'."

"Who are they?"

"Oh! there's only four or five on 'em. It ain't many, you know; you can't think how kind they are! One on 'em sent in a cat (Miss Partington, that was). 'Capital mouser,' says she; got a collar and all on, with the 'nitials.'"

"Really! Where's the cat now?"

"I don't rightly know. I know where the collar is. There's the widow, too; she's uncommonly attached to the sports of the field. You can't think how glad they'll all be to see you. They'll be uncommon fond o' Mister Munster, too."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Tom, wondering why.

"I've told everybody that the horses are all his, and that the house and everything went in his name. Lor'! I knew you, sir; you'd a been grabb'd in a fortnight. Now, he ain't so soft-headed as all that comes to."

"I'm afraid you haven't enjoyed your trip out here, Drinkwater."

"I came here with an object, sir; though the journey isn't over-pleasant. I came here to rob them foreigners o' some money,

and, if Providence will but stand my friend, I think we shall do it."

"I'm glad the horse is all right: and before we go to bed we'll have a talk over the business. He's got a clear week to recover the journey: it's a pretty stiff course, and about four miles to go. They're sure to back something here with an outlandish name; but there isn't money enough in the whole duchy to furnish a decently sized pocket. We must do the best we can."

Tom then rejoined his friends.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### PREPARATIONS FOR A START.

THE evening was chilly, or beginning to feel so. Adèle and the noisy Frenchmen were gone to the tables; where her eyes looked of the brightest and her cheek of the reddest, but where she made less noise than usual. The musicians who played through six long courses of dinner, and an interminable dessert of tobacco, had themselves retired, and Tom and his companions ordered a *chasse-café*, and lit their cigars under cover. They played a game or two at *écarté*, at which neither the Rittmeister nor Weissvogel was great: and then they got again upon the steeplechase.

Just then Billy Drinkwater put his head into the room.

"Like to see the old 'oss, sir? just done him up."

"Certainly," said Tom, rising with Munster and Stuart, and swallowing his coffee.

"Better bring the other gents too," said Billy, with a plenitude of good humour, which rather took his master by surprise, knowing how very particular that individual was on the subject: "better bring them, sir."

"Why so?"

"'Oss looks uncommon bad in the stable, you know, sir; no ways peacocky like. They likes 'em all head and tail: I don't."

"Then why show him in the stable? Keep him till he's had two or three days' rest; just a day or two's walking exercise, nothing more."



"Thought they foreigneering gents might like to back something, p'raps, sir. They won't lay much agin him when he's stood still for a day or two. The 'futter' as they call it, isn't so bad after all."

"There, Baron, what do you think of him?"

The Baron and the Rittmeister meantime were looking him over, with a would-be critical eye, and discussing his points to one another in French and German.

"Legs pretty well?" asked the Baron, with much severity of English.

"Three of 'em," said Billy; "can't say much for the other."

"Mais, mon cher, qu'elles sont joliment *brodées*!" Here Billy blew his nose.

"Yes, yes—he is a very nice horse, Grackendorf; but—but Grabuge!—ah! we shall see."

"What's Grabuge?" inquired Stuart—"English or German bred?"

"Oh! he's an *Echter Deutscher*, a real German, but we have made him an Englishman," said the Rittmeister.

"Ah! how so?"

"We've cut his tail short—now he's an Englisher." This explanation was sufficiently satisfactory. "I shall lay you against your horse, my friend, Gracks."

"Well, I'll take a hundred to twenty," said Tom.

"And I should like half," said Captain Stuart, "unless the Baron will do it twice over."

"Can't afford it," said Crackenthorpe; "but you shall have a pound or two. Well, Baron, is it a bet?" and Tom took out a note-book of oblong form.

"Oh! yes, it's a bet. I shall lay you—what is it? One hundred to twenty against your Peter Blue—no, Blue Peter; that is right." And he drew out a very delicate looking tablet, where, amongst other memoranda of ball, dinner, parade, and riding-school, he entered a mem. as follows:—

"I bet one hundred francs to twenty francs against Blue Peter for the steeple-chase, with Milord von Grackendorf." While, at the same moment Tom Crackenthorpe wrote—"20% to 100% on Blue Peter, for the steeplechase, with *Stuffenfelsen*."

The little disparity between pounds and francs was overlooked for the time.

The morning of the races at length arrived. The little town was full; and at an early hour the country people came pouring in. There was a variety of costumes, scarcely credible anywhere but at Smyrna on a market-day. The hats were charming; and indeed head-dressing, externally, has arrived at a climax which,

we trust, is not more than proportionate to the head-dressing internally of the present day. There was the Leghorn flapper, with a bouquet as big as a cabbage in front; the ordinary pork-pie, with a bunch of scarlet-and-gold the size of a pumpkin behind; the genuine Jack-tar straw, with a splendid knob of damask velvet keeping guard on the top; the clerical dodge in Dunstable, the drab felt billy-cock, and a species of Marie Stuart in black velvet, hung round with white beads in the gayest festoons; and, here and there, one of extraordinary beauty, with a pheasant on one side, a woodcock on the other, and a white bird of paradise half-way down the back. The costumes of the men were no less wonderful than those of the ladies; and when one of our sex does make a fool of himself, he does it effectually. Top-boots, jack-boots, cut-away coats, and metal buttons were supposed to be the normal condition of the English Milord when on the race-course, and as such gained a vast ascendancy over every other costume; full suits of brown knickerbockers and Bartlet boots took second rank as to popularity, and found patrons among the most *recherchés*; whilst white top-coats, with small capes, were daintily interspersed among them, and were supposed to denote the *haute aristocracie* of the Continental ring.

Then it was that Tom was enabled to hedge his hundred to twenty by laying eighty to thirty; and that Stuart, who was to ride, and Munster, and Billy Drinkwater all found flats at about the same odds.

From the time of Blue Peter's arrival he had been steadily improving; and it soon became apparent that he was better out of the stable than in it. The narrative he carried was a very telling one.

"I presume Stuart is duly qualified to ride as a gentleman? the rule is very distinct as to *Edellente*," inquired the Hochwohlgeboren Herr von Donnerwetter von Potstausend of Mr. Cracks.

"He's a friend of mine," said Tom, looking revolvers, "and can just ride the weight; I don't know what you mean by *Edellente*; but perhaps you'd like to ask him?"

"Oh! a friend of Milord, that is sufficient; let his name be put down."

By the time Tom was out of bed, and had breakfasted, and smoked, the bells were all ringing, the town was astir, and the business of the day was about to begin. The entries were made and paid; no less than ten of them: 100 *francs entrée, moitié forfait, pour chevaux entiers, hongres, et juments de tout pays*," with 3,000 francs added. It was a handsome stake to win, and worth the trouble.

"Well! scarcely, when we take the whole of it into consideration."


First, every horse was to go to the course in a procession formed by the Burgomaster and the guilds of the town. The start from the Hôtel de Ville was truly magnificent. Lord Mayor's day was a trifle to it. A tremendous drum-major, length of whiskers and moustache then unknown and unapproached, since achieved by one Crimean hero and three London gents of the great house of Truefitt and Co.; a band of music, a pair of flower-girls, baskets, scissors, and ribbons carried by children of the gymnase; carriage of the worshipful the Burgomaster, many guilds with banners, and each his own band; Grabuge, his owner and rider, *blanche, tête verte*, a rough pea-jacket; Scaramouche, his owner and rider, orange, *tête noire*, a white great-coat; Le Duc-Job, his owner and rider, maroon, *tête noire*, a seal-skin wrapper; La Chatte, her owner and rider, blue, *tête rouge*, a mackintosh; Blue Peter, his owner and rider, *blanche et cerise*, a most approved great-coat, Berlin imitation of Mr. Poole.

Each horse was led by his trainer or groom, and the owners and riders followed in carriages of real regimental cut, postillion, boots, whip, and bugle. Behind the horses, the last of which was Blue Peter, came another band. On striking immediately in the rear of the playful grey, his hind legs flew from under him rather unexpectedly, one of which went clean through the big drum, the other into the ophicleide, damaging the player to the extent of a couple of front teeth. With the exception of this little *contre-temps*, which could not be rectified without another ass and a dentist, nothing remarkable happened. Then came the officials of the races—clerks of the course, starters, *et id genus omne*, mounted on long-tailed Schimmels; and a body of Wiesbaden cavalry, and the same amount of infantry, closed the procession. It was followed by the populace in a state of speechless wonder. The Grand Duke, hundreds of ladies, and the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood, reached the Grand Stand in their private carriages, and the sports of the day began.

Why should I delay my reader whilst I attempt to describe the early state of continental racing?—the ornamental clusters of flowers entwining the pillars of the stand; the absence of all that renders a race-course business-like and beastly; the charming costumes of the women; the badly fitting slang of the men; the inferiority of the horses; the mediocrity of the jockeys, excepting where some English stable-boy was put up to show the Germans how to handle a race-horse; the amazement of the people; the *bonhomie* of the aristocracy; and the total ignorance of the manner in which money was to be made, or the object for which horse-racing was invented?

It is sufficient to say that three flat races were already disposed of, in two of which the representatives of England—*nantes in gurgite rari*—a bankrupt hatter from a racing country town, and an insolvent ex-editor of a sporting organ, who had taken to the turf as a means of subsistence—were eminently successful. They had been attended with nothing noteworthy, and the steeplechase was expected with considerable anxiety. Already the first bell had rung, and the company waited for the blast of the trumpet which was to announce their departure.

All the nobility in the world was nearly ready. Baron Blazeau was on Grabuge, a worn-out hunter, probably never more than third-rate. The Duc Robert de la Forêt-Noire was in a galloping consumption, but anxious to exhibit his weakness on Scaramouche, who might have been a discharged circus horse, and, as Stuart said, looked and went very like it. The Duke's boots and breeches showed a long interval of badly fitting scarlet stockings. Le Col. von Dummkopf came out on Le Duc-Job, the most impatient of animals, who so far discomposed the Colonel that he was obliged to dismount to have his cap tied on sufficiently tight: in remounting the leg-up was a little too strong, and he tumbled over the other side. La Chatte, a quick-looking mare, of very English cut, slipped off with the Comte whilst—in jockey fashion—disposing of his mackintosh, and carried him up to the first fence with one arm out of the coat and the other in it. Mr. Stuart got on Blue Peter with the air of a professional, and took him along in a sort of lurching fashion, which satisfied the Germans with their former favourite, Grabuge. At length they were brought up in line, the trumpet blew a blast, and they were off.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE RACE.

I SAID the trumpet blew a blast, and they were off. This is not strictly true. One only went off, and that was the young Duc de la Forêt-Noire. Scaramouche was quite unknown in the neighbourhood of Wiesbaden. He had been left there as payment for a debt contracted by a celebrated Milord Anglais, who was a broken-down hairdresser and Dissenting minister. He fell thus into the hands of a Wiesbaden landlord, who was glad enough to get rid of him to the most dashing young officer of the Wiesbaden cavalry. He had a most promising-looking head, thin legs, and a thick tail of considerable length. These gifts of nature, together with a large white patch on his rump, recommended him highly to the German youth as a charger, hack, and steeple-chaser. The young cavalry officer was a bit of a coper in his way, though a small one, and was not long in ascertaining that he had got hold of a circus-horse. He was not particularly disappointed at his discovery. The prancings and dancings of his steed, his reputation as an English-bred horse, and his knowledge of his profession, did not detract from his value when the young Baron von Schneesturm went courting or on parade. To be just towards him, he refused more than he was worth, two or three times over, but for one little accident, which cost him dear. He was late for parade almost the first time he rode him. Cantering through one of the principal avenues, at that moment thronged with company, he came upon a brass band playing a favourite waltz. Scaramouche stopped short, and then commenced the most determinedly circular career, strictly in time to the music, and highly to the delight of a crowded audience. Unfortunately, the wind of the musicians was excellent, and they continued to play their favourite tune for a good quarter of an hour, when the music, the horse, and the cornet all shut up together. The immediate result was a good wiggling from his colonel, and three days' arrest; the more serious consequence was that the lady who had hitherto admired the youthful cornet and his English charger, happened to be on the parade, and, having a higher sense of the ludicrous than the affectionate, turned her back upon Von Schneesturm for ever.

That week he passed into the hands of Duc Robert de la Forêt-Noire.

No sooner was the breath gone forth which challenged a start,

than Scaramouche, mindful of the old days of Widdicombe, Gomer-sal, and Waterloo, and imagining that that celebrated battle was about to recommence on the plains of Astley, seized the bit in his teeth, and rushed forward against an imaginary enemy. The career was short, as in days of yore; for, having turned two or three times, and charged again and again within some thirty yards square, seeing that his rider had forgotten to tumble off (as announced in the general bill), he stopped and *died*. The process is simple enough when the horse and rider are *d'accord*; but in the present case Scaramouche, not understanding his rider's pertinacity, first rolled his orange jacket over and over in the dirt, and then lay down upon him and fell asleep.

The day was hot, and the Duke was an immense favourite with the women, so they all began to cry; and, as Scaramouche lay remarkably still, notwithstanding the shouting and trampling, which very much resembled the sham battle, but for Billy Drinkwater he might have been there now.

"My eye, if it ain't the old 'oss!" exclaimed that worthy man, whose antecedents had been a little mysterious. "I know him now. The trumpeter must blow up another tune, and then he'll come again quite lively."

"Why, Drinkwater, you seem to know the horse," said Bobby Munster. "Was he ever in your hands?"

"Well! not exactly; but I looked after him once for a cousin of mine as was along with Mr. Cooke — him as bought Ducrow's business, you know — and they thought a good deal o' this animal."

"I don't suppose they thought he'd ever be a steeple-chaser."

Here the trumpet blew another blast, more fearful than before, and Scaramouche got up again; but, not knowing his country, and missing his old circus acquaintances, he stood still, and allowed his rider to remount him, who came out of the mangle not much flatter, but a good deal hotter, than when he went in.

Having got together a file of soldiers to stand on each side of the refractory horses, and some officials with stiff collars and drawn swords, to see fair play in the rear, after one more tantara-ra on the trumpet, which was not of the Astley pattern, away they went to as good a start as ever was effected, not excepting the memorable Derby of '62, nor some of the still more accomplished performances in the Houghton meeting, by the same official.

The women dried their eyes in the excitement of the moment, and the Prussian and Austrian cavalry, who were there to see, drew their swords and waited for further orders.

The first few fences were not large. This kind consideration was intended to give encouragement to the timid and adhesiveness

to the slippery-seated. The feelings of the ladies must be excused, or rather their expression, as the science of steeple-chasing was a new feature, and esteemed to be highly dangerous. Continental gentlemen know better now, and by dint of good training, may arrive hereafter not only at our excellence, but at the same degree of chicanery in everything connected with this noble sport. They still fail in making handicaps, by which the handicapper pockets the stakes, leaving the fortunate winner to have made his money by judicious "milking" or "hedging;" and the stupid dolts are too honest or too awkward to "put the strings on" over a country.

Well, then, the first fences were negotiated in safety—which is something—the English horse in the rear. Billy Drinkwater was gone in search of victims in consequence of this, but returned sadly crestfallen, with a request that his master or Mr. Munster would get on a fiver for him.

"But where's the ring, Billy?" said the last-named individual, who had quite sufficient confidence in the stable to have put on something for himself.

"Ah! it's all very well to say, where's the ring? but I'm blowed if I ever see such a thing; there's no ring, no nothing; not a Welcher to be seen even; it ain't a bit like a steeplechase. But you'd better make haste, sir; there's another on 'em down, and it isn't Blue Peter. Lor! bless me, what a chance for us if the Captain would but give him a fall."

Just as he spoke Colonel von Dummkopf came down an astonishing buster on the top of his head, doubling up Comte Potstausend, whom La Chatte had put on to his back at the last fence (a good stiff bit of timber), with the bridle in his hand, and ten thousand little sparks and devils dancing about in his eyes. The Colonel's skull in the pit of his stomach did not appear to agree with his temper. Rescue, however, was at hand; and though Potstausend literally declined to run after La Chatte for the pleasure of finishing, the Colonel was placed once more upon his horse by a too friendly party, and requested to make up for lost time.

"Go along, Dummkopf, alles ist noch nicht verloren."

The three left in the race were Grabuge, Scaramouche, and Blue Peter: they were now traversing a very extensive market-garden, in which maize, potatoes, crout, and cabbages were conspicuous; and, though still autumn, the ground was as heavy as the sea-shore. The rider of Grabuge, who was evidently proud of his seat (the seat of honour at present), was leading at a pace which fully accounted for the late mishap, and which proved likely in a field or two to settle the pretensions of the circus-horse.

The Englishman held his own, following steadily in the wake,

and anticipating an easy victory. One thing he had already remarked—that the obstacles were unmistakably intended to put you down. The timber was of the very stiffest, and, though the ground was soft enough, there was every probability of trying it. Scaramouche's bolt was shot, and at the next fence Blue Peter ran up to Grabuge. A bit of standing corn which had not been got in only intervened between a double post and rails, which was negotiated at a fly by both, and with eminent success, unless we mention the difficulty with which the Baron got back into his saddle. It was a near go, and gave Peter the lead.

"Here they come, at last," was the shout from the stand.

"Where? where?" said the people below. "Who's winning?"

"Grabuge," said the foreigners.

"Blue Peter," said the English.

"I'll lay even on Peter; two to one; three to one; anything you like. What odds 'ud *you* like?" said Billy Drinkwater, in a fearful state of excitement, to the ex-King of H—, who was enjoying the scene, and utterly heedless of Billy's liberal offers.

"Lor' bless me! why, you arn't worth a brass farden! What's such a chap as you to do at a race meeting? Here, lay agin somethin' or other."

Meantime, on came the two horses, and within sight of the stand, and the last fence but one from home was the water: it was no size, and only remarkable for the deep mud at the bottom. Blazeau was still up in his stirrups, and had no idea that the race was virtually over—nothing being lost till it's won. But steeple-chasing to a fat Baron, not entirely at home in the pig-skin, is a tiring process, especially about the thighs. He began to be sensible of a little weakness. Side by side came the two, and Blue Peter, hard held, gave Grabuge precedence at the brook. The horse stopped short, and went round; and, had his rider been less particular about the elegance of his jockeyship, which he imagined to be valueless unless he was well forward, he might have gone round too. As it was, he shot clean over his head, plump into the mud, where he exhibited nothing but his legs; whilst Blue Peter, taking it in his stride, came over the last fence an easy winner. Baron Blazeau was fortunately drawn out by his boots before he was quite dead; but the mud that stuck to his colours, and the quantity that filled his mouth, his eyes, and his ears, rendered him deaf to the consolations of his friends, and utterly incapable of acknowledging their timely interference.

Within a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, two more came to the scales—Comte Potstausend, covered with dirt, and on foot: he had lost his cap, one sleeve of his red jacket, and his mare;



Dummkopf rode in on the impatient Duc-Job, having been extricated at the loss of one boot. Then there went up a frightful wail to heaven. Where was the Duc Robert de la Forêt-Noire? Where was Scaramouche? Female lamentations were at their height. All the ladies of the little Opéra Comique and the *corps de ballet* were *au désespoir*. Where was the mayor? Where was the doctor? Oceans of champagne for Adèle, Malchen, Auguste, and Berthe. Three were in violent hysterics; the fourth listened to the consolation of Weissvogel, whose intended father-in-law was still at Heidelberg. Meantime the burgo-master, the corporation, the stewards, and one of the bands went in search of the missing noble. They had already traversed a mile of the course, or more, without discovering the object of their search. At length they reached that formidable double which had discomposed the seat of Blazeau. There, within the two rails, they found him; still mounted, and his amiable quadruped sitting mildly on his haunches, impossible to get off, with any hope of preserving the elegance of his boots, or the dryness of his scarlet stockings. There he sat, holding on by the neck; happy in the consciousness of the sympathy he had excited, unhappy in the uncertainty of how long he had to enjoy it. How to get him out? that was the question.

"Cut it down, of course."

"Of course. Who's got a hatchet?"

They all looked blank at this pertinent question.

"How did you get in there, Duc?"

"Oh! I jumped in."

"Well, then, of course he can jump out."

That's good sound logic.

"Of course he can; but he won't."

"Let's come behind. Here, Corporal Dampfnödel, draw your sword, and go behind; now, not too deep."

But so ungrateful was Scaramouche, that he let drive at the corporal, and nearly drew his teeth, unseating the Duc, who was unprepared for such a demonstration.

"Where's the nearest house?" asked the young Duke, in despair.

"*Eine Stunde*: only about three miles; go and get a saw, and call at the grand stand. Say the Duke is quite safe, and, if they'll send a carriage, he'll come up."

With some difficulty the Duke was persuaded to dismount in the mud, and climb over the rails. He was no sooner there than Scaramouche raised himself on his hind legs, pushed his head out, and with one whisk of his tail was by his side. He had done no harm to anything in his descent, excepting the burgomaster's toe, and the cocked hat of an official, which he took from his head

between his teeth, and carried round to the company, at a playful amble; signifying his expectation of a few florins, as a termination to his performance.

"Now, sir," said the clerk of the course, "would you like to receive the stakes in napoleons, or our paper?"

This was addressed to the winner.

"Stakes!" said Stuart, quite overcome with surprise. "Oh! I suppose Mr. Crackenthorpe has arranged all about that; we are to have the stakes, then? Gad, that's odd too; but I should think napoleons would do."

And then they went home to dinner. Such a dinner as Tom gave, to be sure! There were the landlord's daughters, and Bobby Munster, the winner, of course, Weissvogel, the Rittmeister, and all the losers. There is no man gets over a discomfiture so easily as a Frenchman, and before the second glass of champagne, the Duc de la Forêt-Noire had forgotten his ignominious performance between the posts. He took to himself all the credit that had not fallen naturally to the successful hero, whose health was drunk, and whose victorious brow was crowned with a laurel chaplet, when the evening was far enough advanced. Baron Blazeau, or the Baron of Beef, as he was facetiously called, was quite himself again, and contended that he could have won easily, but for the final mishap at the brook. On this point he became clearer, as the recollection of the mud became less vivid.

"And what have you won, my very good friend Cracks!" inquired von Choucroute of Tom, as they smoked their cigars in the midst of a Babel of tongues and an atmosphere of Bremen tobacco.

"What have I won? Well, nothing much excepting the stakes," said Tom, slowly taking out his betting-book. "To be sure, there's that hundred of you, Rittmeister; but Stuart has five-and-twenty of that."

Here the Rittmeister drew out his purse, a long slender affair, not unlike Iago's, and proceeded deliberately to draw the rings.

"No, no! never mind about it now: we shall settle to-morrow. I have twenty pounds to pay to our friend Blazeau here, as I hedged on Grabuge. She's not a bad mare that. How's she bred, Baron?"

Blazeau was at that moment cleaning his plate with his knife.

"Oh! very good blood, full blood; but I have brought the money, as I go away to-morrow to my regiment."

Whilst saying which, he counted out five napoleons on the table, and passed them over to Tom, with a happy confidence which at once re-established himself in his good opinion, if it had ever been shaken by the fact of the loss.

"What's this for?" said Tom, eyeing the pieces.

"My lost wager," said the Rittmeister; again folding up his everlasting purse, and putting it into his pocket, with the assurance that he should not have to pay anything more that night.

"But that's not a hundred pounds, livres, pfunds, sterling," said Tom; "you laid me a hundred pounds to twenty. D—— it, Stuart! make him understand that I'm not going to be done in that way. He must shell out."

With some difficulty Stuart made the Rittmeister comprehend the little difference of opinion and value; but it was quite clear that the astute von Choucroute either couldn't or wouldn't understand.

"Hundred pounds!" said that indignant German. "Gott bewahr! two years' pay! Grabuge himself is not worth the money."

And here he rose from his seat, and buttoned his frock-coat tighter than ever over his already tightened purse, to say nothing of preparations for a bolt.

"Bobby, put your back against the door for a moment, whilst we explain. Baron Blazeau, did I bet you twenty francs, or twenty pounds on Grabuge to-day?"

The Baron collected his ideas, and was just sensible enough to remember that he had won; so he answered without much hesitation: "Francs? no, pounds to be sure, my friend Mr. Crackendorf; we always bet in pounds."

"Of course we do."

And then ensued a scene of considerable confusion. Every one spoke in his own language, rather above a whisper. The ladies left the room, and the minstrels followed after. The contention was at its height, when Potstausend proposed a compromise.

"If Blazeau would accept francs, would Crackenthorpe accept francs too?"

"No," said Stuart, who was a party concerned.

"I don't want your money," said Tom; "but it's a plant: never mind, Stuart, we'll settle it between us afterwards."

"But I wouldn't be done," said Bobby, "if I were you," who had a great objection to any one else doing his friend but himself.

"Sapriste?" said the Frenchman, who was much more alive to the ways of the world.

"Donnerwetter!" said the Germans, who had never heard of such bloodthirsty backers of horses before. What the Englishmen said I shouldn't like to repeat; but it ended by a general amnesty, a clinking of glasses, more champagne, and the pocketing of five napoleons, save one, which was handed over to Baron Blazeau. He had sacrificed himself to the Rittmeister, or his love of truth to the occasion.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE BLUE PETER HOISTED AGAIN.

"WHERE shall we go, or what shall we do now?" said Bobby Munster, whose abdication of the door-post left him without any pleasurable excitement.

"Let's go to the rooms. One shy more and we'll be off for Lushenham the day after to-morrow," suggested Tom.

"But I haven't any money," said Bobby.

"I have no objection," said Stuart; "but you must lend me twenty or thirty until I get a remittance."

"Do you mean francs or napoleons, Stuart?" said Tom Crackenthorpe.

"Well, I meant napoleons."

"Then come to my room, and let us get the stakes. They paid them like men: it's quite a pleasure to race here."

Of course no one ever refuses a gentleman-rider's request for such a trifle; and away they went. Play was fast and furious.

"What have you done?" said Tom, about an hour afterwards.

"They've cleaned me out, by Jove!" said Munster, diving his hand into his empty pocket, and looking quite as happy as usual. To be sure it wasn't his money.

"And you, Captain?"

"Oh! usual luck. I tried roulette and trente-et-quarante: never had one turn at either. They haven't left me a stiver."

This was strictly true; but they had paid him over between thirty and forty napoleons, which he meant to keep for himself, as long as fortune would allow him.

"Here's a go!" said Bobby.

"Not exactly; for I'll be hanged if I haven't got rid of all mine, and twenty pounds which I borrowed of that bald-headed punter, with the sleepy eyes and the long rake. We must stay here till we get some more, unless there's something else we can put Blue Peter into."

"I'm afraid there's nothing more to be done in the racing line till next year," said the *soi-disant* Captain.

"Then let's sell Blue Peter," said Bobby; and, considering he didn't belong to him, it was not a bad idea.

"Well, I'm going to bed," said Crackenthorpe, "so good night. They've got their stakes back; but I'll be hanged if we don't have 'em again next year."

The next morning when Crackenthorpe woke, his feelings were somewhat peculiar, not to say unpleasant. He stretched himself as he sat up in bed, shivered, scratched his head (which was easily done, having no nightcap), and had an indistinct sentiment that there was something wrong. His head ached; and as he looked towards the window, he saw his yesterday's colours—white and cherry—upon a chair back. There was no great difficulty in recollecting that those colours had been triumphant, and that, a considerable stake had found its way into his pockets; that dissatisfied with its quarters, it had taken its flight, and was now probably rewarding the honest industry and virtuous enterprise of M. Gorgetout, the lessee of the rooms.

"What a fool I am!" said he, as he kicked off the eiderdown pillow, and gave his eyes a final rub—"what a fool I am!" And there was nobody to contradict him, as neither Munster nor Stuart, nor any of his numberless toadies, male or female, occupied the same room. "Upon my soul, it would be the best thing to do to sell old Peter and be off to Lushenham. They must have begun cub-hunting a long time ago: they'll be in the open in another fortnight. I'll go and see how the new house gets on." Here he snatched up a pair of toilette-scissors, and seized his moustaches with the left hand. They had grown during his foreign sojourn. "I'll have these beggars off at once—only fit for cavalry officers among the swells, and swindlers and billiard-markers among what are called the respectable classes." Here he faltered. "Yet d—n it! I don't know. 'Pon my soul they're rather becoming! I wonder what Marian Bulrush or Flora Bingham would think of it. Never mind—here goes!" and, with more than Spartan fortitude, he made a dash at the right side of his nose, with considerable success. It left a large gap; so he completed the havoc. Then he looked for his razor, and just recollected that he had not brought one, and that Bobby Munster's flattery of him was exhibited most unmistakably in this case by imitation. Billy Drinkwater was as clean-shorn as a new sixpence, so he sent for him.

I know nothing requiring greater moral and physical courage than cutting off what the wearer considers a handsome moustache, at the end of a few weeks. If Tom had conquered the first difficulty, the second assuredly cost him some pain; for he swore most lustily at intervals, and returned the razor to his servant without any complimentary allusions to its excellence. However, there he was, with his lips well scarified, manifestly made up for England; and he ordered his breakfast with a sort of defiant air, which boded Lushenham by the earliest conveyance and shortest route.

His valiant henchman was soon at his side; but the aspect of

the bosom friend to whom you have lent thirty naps, and who has irretrievably got rid of them beyond all chance of repayment, does not increase the appetite for breakfast.

"Munster, have you seen Stuart this morning? I shall be off from this place as soon as I can."

"So shall I," rejoined the other, "as soon as I can: I don't suppose the governor thinks me worth taking out of pawn, and I can't go without. It's rather a bore for the landlord. He seems a good-natured sort of fellow, and it's a shame of the governor to victimize him."

This seemed a new light to put it in. And whether Tom Crackenthorpe wished to relieve the landlord or the governor, I can't say; but he said, "Oh! we'll manage. I'll lend you enough to get to England: we can settle it afterwards. I shall leave Blue Peter behind, and tell Drinkwater to bring the money home, if we can't sell him before to-morrow."

Here Captain Stuart joined them. "The Duc de la Forêt-Noire wants Blue Peter. He says he can win a hatful of coin with him here and in Austria. He's very sweet on the horse."

"He's very welcome to him. Shall you mind telling him so!"

"Not I. What will you take for him?"

"Could he have won very easily yesterday?"

"Well, you know, Grabuge had rather the foot of him; but then Blazeau can't ride like Jim Mason, and so the old horse managed to win."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Crackenthorpe. "Then I'll take a hundred a-n-d fifty."

"Cheap enough, too," added Bobby Munster.

"What am I to do if I can't get more than a hundred and twenty? That's the price he put it at. You know you've to get him home again. When do you go?" added the Captain after a thoughtful pause.

"To-night, if I can. I'm sick of this place. I want some hunting."

"Then give me *carte-blanc*, and I'll manage the horse by to-night."

"So much the better; and then I needn't leave Billy Drinkwater behind."

The Captain didn't want Billy's assistance, so he determined on finishing the business that evening.

"He took a bottle of wine, excellent Marcobrunner, with the Duke that day, at his hotel. "Then you wouldn't mind giving 150 louis for the horse? He can beat anything in this country, and give three stone to Grabuge. In fact no weights would ever bring them together."

"You think not, M. le Capitaine? Eh, well! what will you?"

I must have the horse; and your friend Cracks is inexorable. He will take no less? No!"

"Nothing under. By Jove, no! You know, it's not the correct thing to offer anything less than his price. It wouldn't do. He's a regular Tartar."

"Very good. Here's the money," said the Duc, with a sigh. It was just three times as much as he had ever yet given for a horse.

Just towards the close of day, when Crackenthorpe was about to take his place in the night-train for England, the Captain arrived, his face glowing with honesty and intelligence, and happiness at having got rid of the horse.

"Well, I'm come to say good-bye; and there's the money—130*l.*—to put into the mouth of your sack. I got him to spring ten pounds."

"All right. Good-bye, Stuart. I hope we shall see you in England soon. Write us a line, and say the time. We can manage to put you up."

With a light heart and a light purse, consisting of about 20*l.* which he had borrowed, and the proceeds of the Blue Peter transaction, Tom Crackenthorpe started for England. Nothing could be pleasanter than his prospects at Lushenham; and having arranged his money matters satisfactorily in Paris, by paying his Wiesbaden creditor, he sailed for Dover.

Captain Stuart returned to Heidelberg, having lived about two months on his chance acquaintance of the Neckar Bridge, having borrowed about 40*l.*, and taken a handsome commission of 20*l.* more on his deal with Blue Peter. He thought Crackenthorpe too good to be left, so he laid a happy plan for rejoining his friend at short notice. He looked upon him as a sort of annuity, payable at sight.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## HOME.

WHEN that sententious philosopher Doctor Samuel Johnson was asked what he liked best in Scotland, he is reported to have answered—"The road back to England." Under ordinary circumstances, I should not myself be lost in admiration at this dictum of the great lexicographer, imagining it to want that necessary qualification for respect, truth. But there are times, places, and circumstances, when turning one's head towards home has a charm for man, quite as great as for any donkey. To be sure, the first consideration is to what sort of a home you are going. If to a scolding wife, half-a-dozen dirty children, an overbearing stud-groom, or a smoky chimney, of course you must have managed badly on your tour to wish to return. Your home may be between two quarrelsome lawyers, or on the second floor of a powder-mill, or next to a young gentleman's academy, or in Whitechapel, in which case the road home ought to be uncommonly smooth to make it acceptable, or your temporary absence one of unqualified misery. Now, certainly Tom's little excursion had had no great drawbacks. He had lost neither appetite, nor weight, nor much money. He had not attempted a book and failed, nor been half eaten by mosquitoes, nor been mistaken for a Russian spy, nor been drinking the waters; yet he was delighted when he found his head once more set straight for Lushenham, and nothing but the English Channel and one hundred and forty miles between himself and his Box.

There is something exceedingly pleasant, in idea, in entering upon a house for the first time. There is a vast accession of importance attached to the situation of a householder and the possession of a vote. There are increased opportunities for the display of taste in plate glass, china, and furniture. You can ask a man, and not only a man, but a woman, to be your guest. You have a status in society, which never belongs to lodgings or chambers; and, especially in your parish, when you may become overseer, churchwarden, mayor, secretary of the coal-club, and God knows what besides, if of a peaceful, or religious, or political turn of mind; or a captain of militia, or subscriber to the county hounds, or seconder to the Tory candidate, or master to a pack of harriers, if of a warlike or sporting bias—things never yet heard of in the inhabitants of a two-pair back. There's registration, and the water-rates, and the poor-rates, and the house and land



taxes, and the stocking of cellar, and the pew in church—all of which add immensely to the respectability, not to say, dignity, of the lessee. Then there's the certainty that not a woman within ten miles will be without her curiosity as to one piece of furniture which must be placed there; the knowledge that you are an object of speculation on good grounds; the doubts as to the propriety of dancing with Mary Jones more than twice in the same evening; and the heavy responsibility of a real entertainment—all these help to make up the sum of happiness to the newly fledged housekeeper. There's the nice little dinner, which is sure to be spoiled, and the beer, which is out only one fortnight before it ought to have been; and the cook, who is always in love with the rural Blue when she's not too drunk to listen to his caterwauling, and the tile that comes off, and the shindy that goes on; and all the little subscriptions—the village Cricket Club, and the Mechanics' Institute, and the Dorcas Society, and the Missionary Fund, and half-a-dozen pleasurable excitements in every parish, so soon as man deserts his bachelor ways, and becomes a householder of the very humblest dimensions.

No wonder that Tom Crackenthorpe turned his head towards home with considerable satisfaction, though it is but fair to add that he knew nothing whatever of these advantages of housekeeping. He had had a very comfortable month for what would have kept one of the inferior clergy for about a year. He had not made a very successful hit with Blue Peter, considering the expenses. His play, or rather that of his friends, and their bills, were, I may say, a drawback to his schemes of economy; and, as Bobby Munster was once more out of funds, the ready money share of the château was to come out of Tom's pocket. Then he had made a valuable acquaintance or two, Captain Stuart especially, as a set-off; and he had got rid of a steeplechase screw, which was not of much value to him—his capabilities were too well known at the Spa. All things considered, it wasn't such bad fun; besides, it was all over; so he lit a choice regalia, and began to think of the new house at Lushenham.

"I wonder what the château looks like, Munster, now it's finished?"

"Look like?" said Bob. "Why, about half finished. All those sort of places do, at first. I hope it don't smoke."

"I hope it don't smoke regalias," said Tom, "unless it smokes its own; that fellow Stuart has stumped me."

"Here's one," said Munster in reply, offering him a case with a great deal of liberality.

"Is it a pretty good one?" said Tom.

"I've no doubt it is; at least it's one of your own."

And here he turned it over, and dwelt upon the large black

vein, with the eye of a connoisseur. There's this to be said of Munster—he disguised neither his necessities nor his mode of supplying them.

"I wonder what sort of a fellow the parson is?" again said Tom.

"Not a long-winded one, I hope," rejoined the other. "Here, steward, bring me a glass of hot brandy and water—two glasses. You must have one, Tom."

"I suppose we must have over old Sparkes and our Pumpington friend. I wonder whether the widow is there still?"

"Certainly; didn't Billy Drinkwater say she was? You'll be carried bodily away by the woman, Tom. Never was such a chance in a country village."

"You'll run the same risk, Bob. What a fortunate woman she will be that gets you."

"Well! I am not to be caught with chaff, I can tell you. Mine's a very simple process; and, as I discovered it myself, I take great credit to myself for the invention." Bob looked as if he meant to be asked; so Tom asked him how, in sailing so near the wind, he managed to escape the storm.

"Not difficult at all. Well, they *are* good regalias. When I dance with a girl I know nothing about, I always ask after her brother, as I think I must have been at school with him. So prolific are we English that I seldom meet with any answer but one—'Which do you mean?' This is a spec that must at once be given up. If she says—'It's impossible, as I haven't one,' it's pretty certain that the estate will be divided equally amongst the sisters. Make further inquiries; it may turn out well—though I was once rather upset in my investigations."

"How's that?" said Tom, who, albeit not mercenary, did not think the scheme altogether a bad one.

"I got into a family of ten daughters; and, after calculating that they might get fifty pounds a-year each, I found that was entailed on a cousin. However, they managed to keep it in the family. The eldest girl married him outright. But you'll never do. You're too susceptible, Tom, by half, for this wicked world."

"What's the stud consist of, Munster? You always have a wonderful sample or two."

"I must go to Tilbury."

"Why not buy? it's cheaper and more satisfactory."

"Ah! that's all very well; but there's no tick at the Corner; the dealers like their money, and, as to the gentlemen, they're worse than either. They're always hard-up, or they wouldn't sell anything worth having. Now, I think Tilbury's good till the horses are done with."

"When will that be?" said Tom.

"Oh! at the end of the season, if everything goes right. But if the governor gets nothing, I suppose I must take them on through the summer."

"Mind you don't sell one by accident, because that's very like felony;" and at that moment the steward came round to collect the tickets and the brandy and waters. There were hurried *adieux* from those who had travelled a few days together, and were never more to meet in this world; strong determinations on the part of some never to go through so much again; and anticipations on the part of others of another turn next year; the pleasures of memory on the part of a bearded vagabond who had left Paris behind him, and those of hope in the modest little French girl in the corner, who was just consigned to the tender mercies of an English family, where a footman was kept, and the eldest of six children to be committed to her charge was eight years old, and already a proficient in broad Yorkshire. Amongst the motley crowd Tom and his friend found their way into the mail train.

"What's to be done now, Mrs. Sampson?" said Mr. Taplow, Crackenthorpe's valet, butler, and general in-door agent; "here's the gov'nor a-coming home on the 5th, the very day of our little party."

"Well, I suppose he don't want the whole house, does he? There's room enough for all on us, once in a way." And Mrs. Sampson looked so much defiance that it was evident the tea was stronger than usual that evening. "But how do you know he's coming on the 5th?"

"Mr. Drinkwater's brought a letter. We're to have both the bachelors' rooms ready, and the back room and the boudoir won't be wanted till the 10th."

Here Mr. Drinkwater entered himself, and, after saluting his fellow-servants after his absence, he interposed—

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson, sorry to say it, if it inconveniences you, but them little trials is good for the temper."

Billy delivered himself pompously of this sententious remark; and Mrs. Sampson fired up immediately—

"Temper be blowed, Mr. Drinkwater! Isn't it enough to provoke one, when one has stuffed the beef, and made the sausage-meat, and gone and got everything? Besides, there's lots on 'em coming from Barkby Stoneham. Ah! he can't come home on the 5th, and that's all about it."

"That's all very well," observed Mr. Taplow; "but who's to prevent him?"

"Why, you, to be sure," sung out both at once.

"Tell him the house is burnt down—no! I mean the chimley's

on fire—and we've got the sweeps, and none o' the furniture's down in any o' the rooms. Lord! it's easy enough—

‘Remember, remember, the fifth of November!’”

sang Mrs. Sampson, getting on good terms with herself when she saw that her advice had made an impression. In fact, the plan seemed feasible enough, after making a suggestion or two; and much easier and pleasanter than going round to put off their guests to a day that might never arrive. So Mr. Taplow undertook to write a line to his master at the “Hôtel des Princes, Rue Rivoli, Paris,” to beg of him to remain a couple of days longer away, as it was impossible to get the house ready.

This letter would have had the desired effect but for one little circumstance, not uncommon in like cases. The letter never got to the master, and was left kicking about in the dead-letter office in Paris, till an enterprising official, some six months afterwards, forwarded it to Lushenham, when it fell again into the hands of Mr. Taplow, who disposed of it summarily, by roasting it, like Lord Cobham, over a slow fire, whilst he soliloquised—

“Ah! you're a pretty one, ain't you, to turn up now? It's the only time as I ever see our governor in an out-and-out tantrum. My eye! how he pitched into old Joines the carpenter. Poor old Mother Sampson! I wonder what's become o' the old girl. Ah! drink's the ruin on us all!”

By that time the embers were all burnt out, or, as he observed, the people were all out of church; so he went and drew himself some beer immediately, and forgot the subject for the rest of his life.

It is not in mortals to command success—they can only deserve it; and if industrious care for the attainment of an object has any virtue in it, then the half-dozen servants at Lushenham were very meritorious persons. Mrs. Sampson was indefatigable in baking, and making, and stewing; Mr. Taplow laid his master's cellar under contribution to within an ace of detection; Mary Gibbons, the housemaid, for the first time since her engagement by Mrs. Crackenthorpe, condescended to do some real dusting; and Sally, the kitchenmaid, was in voluntary requisition from morning to night. The guests mainly consisted of some gentlemen's gentlemen from Barkby Stoneham; and, as Thursday was a non-hunting day, and the supper was to take place on that night, they mustered in full force. There were several eligible parties from among the workmen who had been employed on the house. Joines the carpenter—Joe Joines, and Tom Hodman the mason, both unmarried; that is, Joe Joines's wife had been separated from him judicially for a cause in which a split skull was the principal witness, and a pewter pot the accessory. It made the ferocious Benedict rather

a favourite with the women. There was Mrs. Bransby's maid, a young lady choice in her selection of caps and language—both of them had a sort of pink-ribbon flavour; and Mrs. Greystoke's own groom, a gentleman of tender years, great impudence, and much importance, which he derived from the influence of that mysterious personage. The Vicarage furnished a couple of maids, both of whom were supposed to be visiting a sick aunt of one of them, who liked being read to of an evening. Farmer Ball, who lived outside of the village, had sent his shepherd and the man-of-all-work who groomed his hunters and looked after the pigs. The latter was famous in the neighbourhood for a song, the chorus of which was, "Solomon tells us a different story," and which had gone the round of all the neighbouring publics, to the intense disgust of the parish clerk, who was, however, persuaded to be present on this occasion. And the minor parts were filled by the blacksmith's son—a perfect Vulcan in his amours—and a few helpers and hangers-on always to be found in any number about a sporting neighbourhood. One person only, who might have been there, was absent. Billy Drinkwater took sweet counsel with himself, and, though he discreetly held his tongue, managed to be absent without offence.

It was very soon known in the village that the new tenant of the Farm was expected home from "foreign parts." It seemed as though the Vicar for once had made a mistake—had been too hasty in the conclusions he drew from the removal of a horse or two. Not only was Billy Drinkwater come back, but with the most unmistakable intelligence of Tom Crackenthorpe's intended return. Billy told the butler, as in duty bound; the butler told the clerk; the parish-clerk told the sexton; and the sexton told the whole village. The consequence was a great scrimmage.

Let's begin with the Vicar and his family. Mr. Partington was seriously affected. What if Tom should be a most respectable young man after all?—respectable, of course, meant well-to-do in the world. At all events, he must be visited: as a parishioner, whether given to the secular enjoyments of port and sport or not, it would be his duty to call. He had seen nothing of the lady lately, and perhaps by-gones had better be by-gones. That was the view that charity induced him to take of it. Mamma Partington had her peculiar notions of young men in general, which rather accorded with the Vicar's views of this one in particular. She was by no means willing to abandon hope, though, as the Vicar's right-hand man, it was her duty to discourage profligacy, past, present, and to come. Suppose she waited, to see what others would do. To be sure, they would get off first; but then she had the inside, next the rails. Matilda and Josephine were both inclined to go for the stakes. There was no animosity

on the subject between them, and they would have been glad in most things to have divided; but here was a case in which there could be no dead heat. So they made up their minds to put forth their powers.

Miss Matilda took to visiting the Vicar's man-of-all-work. The grey was to have some extra corn, more careful grooming, and to be singed over again by the beginning of next week. Jim had a good deal of trenching to do in the garden; but the young lady was liberal of extra beer money; so Jim got forward, and the old grey carried his tail an inch or two higher. From the bottom drawer of the chest came forth an elaborate hat; not such a chimney-pot as our friend Mrs. Greystoke sported, but a real lady's hat, short in the crown, turned at the sides, with a place for a feather or two, and looking lost without it.

"Ma', dear, come here a moment; what's become of the crimson cockatoo I used to wear last year?"

"Oh, my dear, how should I know? I suppose Josephine had it to wear at Lady Bountiful's school-feast, and forgot to put it back."

Here Matilda opened another drawer, and was happy to find that the crimson cockatoo had not flown away. Another dive into the same mysterious wardrobe produced a skirt, which was immediately started to the village tailor's, with a request that Mr. Shears would call in the morning.

"You know I must have a new body, ma', dear, and I may as well have one that I can ride in, and that will do for walking as well."

All this was rather against Josephine's chance. There is no question that the eldest sister had adopted a start, which was likely to be successful. However, it was no use to repine—no crying over spilled milk; so she set to work to remedy past negligence. She might have been a sportswoman too. It does so happen, however, that like does not always love like; the most piquant persons prefer a little contrariety. All she could do for the present, therefore, was to adopt the sentimental, and trust to chance. Her mother, aware of the value of two strings to one bow, was quite willing to assist. She was undoubtedly the better-looking of the two, and, perhaps her mother's favourite daughter. The old lady saw no rival but one, and that was the widow. She out of the way, it could be a toss-up only which it should be of the two. The man who backed the hare would have laid odds on Matilda; and the gentleman who stood on the tortoise would have backed Josephine at evens. All this, however, was to depend upon Tom's respectability.

Of course, respectability included landed property, or consols. Joseph himself would have had no chance in his every-day suit:

as the Viceroy of Egypt, he might have been a very Rochester for morality. Everybody knows that vice in a laced doublet is venial—that it is treated in this world with a considerable amount of lenity; we presume, because it is so hardly dealt with in the next: and Mrs. Partington was not deficient in charity. It covers a multitude of other people's sins, especially when they are well gilt.

It must be confessed that, if the widow Greystoke had any misgivings, she did not exhibit them. Externally the new arrivals made no difference in her. She was sufficiently charming at all times. Her horses, her head-dress, her habit, was all that she desired it should be.

"Mrs. Bransby?"

"My dear?"

"I suppose you know that Mr. Crackenthorpe and his friend are expected on the 5th?"

"So I hear. Those Partingtons are making great preparations."

"The Partingtons are fools. I don't think he's to be caught by fine feathers."

"They make fine birds, Kitty. You haven't forgot the water, dear," said the old lady, regarding her evening tumbler with suspicion.

"I wonder what his friend is like?" said the widow.

"Oh! bother his friend. You'd better leave him to the Partingtons, and stick to the real thing."

There can be no doubt of the excellence of this advice.

"Never you fear, mother. I should like to know whether he likes the dashing, enthusiastic, take-a-lead style of performance; or whether he prefers the timid, bridle-gate, and turnpike-road business?"

"You'll soon see that I should think, Kitty."

"The former answered exceedingly well for a time, but's becoming vulgar. And it makes enemies. The admiration man bestows upon us ought never to interfere with that which he lavishes on himself."

"That's out of a play, dear, I'm sure," said Mrs. Bransby, as she finished her brandy and water, and prepared for a start, by pulling out some refractory pins, and easing herself of a very elaborate front.

The General Post-Office is no better than the rest of the world: it is fearfully given to lying. In consequence of which a letter purporting to be delivered at Lushenham on the afternoon of the 5th of November, lay snugly ensconced in the rural P.O. until the morning of the 6th, when it was delivered with the rest of the correspondence. This is an inconvenience generally: in the present

instance, perhaps not, as it would have deprived the reader of a pleasant episode in Mr. Crackenthorpe's career, and established him at Lushenham with as little *éclat* as the inauguration of a new lord mayor.

By seven o'clock the guests were assembled in Tom's new kitchen, and doing justice to the capital cheer placed before them by Mrs. Sampson and Mr. Taplow. There was sausage-meat of all sorts, every part of a pig that had been fatted at Tom's expense, for family eating, and killed by the clerk of the parish, who usually combines that clerical responsibility of sacrificial duty with his more prosaic accomplishments. There was a fine round of beef, too, garnished with the very last of the autumn vegetables—thanks to the gardener, who sat on the left-hand of the cook and house-keeper, facing the ecclesiastic afore-mentioned. There were a couple of handsome puddings, rather anticipating Christmas, and an equal number of magnificent pies, whilst a scarcely-cut Stilton, naturally intended for kitchen use, and some early celery, adorned the sideboard. With such and such-like dainties the tables groaned, and, like the bard of Teos, though my pen would willingly linger among them, I hasten on to sing of matter more digestible, or better suited to my reader's appetite.

I do not know that a parish clerk is less capable of carrying his liquor than the vicar or bishop: be that as it may, by the time Mr. Singer was ready to propose a toast, he was far gone in inebriety. He was not the only one. Mrs. Sampson had made good use of her time, and Joe Joines was as usual. That gentleman was remarkable for a rather weak head and strong self-sufficiency. Most of the others were in a fair way to enjoy themselves; but still required time for the full development of that species of happiness of which they were in search.

"The Queen!" said a gentleman unconnected with the chair.

"And the Prince o' Wales, and the Staghounds!" added a swell groom, who was lighting his pipe at the candle.

"In course," said Mr. Joines, "in bumpers;" upon which he swallowed a tumbler of punch, with as little shrinking as if it had been water. There came a pause after this, and, excepting a strong flirtation between Mary Gibbons and the swell groom, very little was said. The gentlemen were engaged with their pipes, and the ladies in filling the gentlemen's glasses. Mr. Singer took care of Mrs. Sampson's and his own.

"Now, Taplow," said the latter, "what do you say to a song?"

"No objections at all, sir," said he from the bottom of the table; "only respect the ladies; a sentiment pr'aps would be better?"

"Never mind us, Mr. Taplow; we're all fond of music" said Mrs. Sampson.



"Then let 's have 'The Great Mogul' at once, Perrin; out with it."

And so he did; and, excepting for one verse, in which were some peculiarities which belong rather to eastern households than English ones, the ladies had no cause to blush.

Then Miss Gibbons favoured the company with "The Lass of Richmond Hill;" and one of the keepers sang "Little Pigs."

It was voted low, though Mrs. Sampson joined in the chorus and the housemaid hid her blushes on the shoulders of the groom. Time was getting on; another brew of punch was called for. The carpenter was nearly asleep, with his head on his breast, and his spoon in his mouth, which he had replaced by his pipe in his tumbler; and the clerk was making love to Mrs. Sampson in a manner which she resented by filling him bumper after bumper, and drinking about one-third of each potion before handing it to him. Charming interchange of feeling!

At length it became necessary to propose the toast of the evening. Mr. Singer was once more on his legs, and it was very evident that he had some difficulty in keeping there. With considerable incoherence he began:—

"I rise with difficulty, gents; beg pardon, ladies; no, ladies and gents, to propose a-a-rate, that is, a-a-toast; the toast, I'm bould to say, of the—the evening. We aven't, none on us, I believe, the pleasure of the acquaintance of the young squire, Mr. Crack-crack-en ('Crackenthorpe' said Taplow). I beg pardon, Crackemall; but no doubt he'll prove wery agreeable. We shall like him, and, in course, he'll like us. Yes! gents, we shall get on uncommon well together, I des say. I don't say as he ain't his faults; all on us has. There's Joines: there ain't a better feller in existence, but he's fond of his liquor—fond of his liquor. We've all on us our faults, and so has Mr. What's his name, Crack, Cracken something. Lor! bless me, how my memory do fail me, to be sure! Well! he's his faults. His beer ain't no ways so good as it ought to be. But what I say is this, as he ought to be supported as long as he lives with such uncommon kind and—and—liberal people as has entertained us here to night. I never see anything ansomer; our westry dinners is nothin' to what we've seen this evening. What I says, then (hiccup) is this: As Mrs. Sampson's a regular trump, and Taplow the love-liest of his sex; no, I mean (here the hammering on the table drowned the explanation); and I propose health and success to this establishment, and begs to couple with it the names of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson—I mean Mr. Sampson and Mrs. Taplow—with, let me see, nine times nine."

"Eighty-one," said Mr. Joines, who had just been roused by the knocking of tables and jingling of glasses.

"So fill up rum 'uns, bumpers (hiccup) I mean:" and with that he mounted the chair; and Mr. Joines, not to be outdone, the table.

How many of the rounds had been got through I don't know, but in the middle of it two figures appeared in the doorway, muffled up in pea-jackets, with their hats on. They walked deliberately up to the table, and seizing the spokesman and his abettor, sent them flying on to their backs in the middle of the room, amidst a general rising of the company and a breaking of glass, where they remained perfectly insensible. It's the last feather that breaks the camel's back.

"Taplow."

"Yes, sir:" for he recognised the voice of his returned master.

"Did you get my letter?"

"No, sir."

"Who are those noisy blackguards?"

"One's Mr. Singer and the other Mr. Joines," replied Mr. Taplow, in a subdued treble.

"What are they?" said Tom again.

"Very drunk, sir, I'm afraid."

"I know that, you old fool; I mean, *what* are they?"

"One's the clerk, and other's the carpenter, sir."

"Then go into the stable-yard, get Drinkwater to give you two wheelbarrows and two sober helpers, and wheel them home, and then bring me something to eat. This is more like Bedlam than a gentleman's house."

Instead of wheeling them home, Mr. Drinkwater, who was a sound churchman, ordered them up to the Vicarage, where, having propped them against the door and rang the bell, he left them to themselves. When the door opened they fell into the arms of the Vicar, who was just about retiring for the night. He spent a pleasant hour or two in endeavouring to resuscitate them, and eventually sent for the doctor. Crackenthorpe had a long confab with Mr. Taplow before retiring to rest; and Mrs. Sampson was requested to find another place that day month.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE STABLE.

AND so Tom and Munster took possession of what was once a respectable farm-house, and was known as "The Château." The garden was trimmed and neat, laid out in gravel walks and box-edgings; a few new trees on the walls; a little glass, giving indications of a greenhouse or conservatory, with other advantages for the fabrication of a builder's and mason's bill. There were some arbours here and there, round which the straggling roses had been induced to climb; there was some water in a round stone basin on the little lawn, with a triton or two, who blew the water out of their horns and wetted the admiring stranger whenever he forgot to steer to windward. Inside of the house was everything calculated to make bachelorhood pleasant, and to preclude the absolute necessity for a tea-urn or its presiding divinity. There was no smoking-room, because every room was a smoking-room excepting one; that was a lady's room to all intents and purposes, and belonging exclusively to the reigning Mrs. Crackenthorpe, who, notwithstanding Mr. Partington's surmises, was no other than Tom's own mother. In these days of indiscriminate impropriety, perhaps the reverend gentleman might have been forgiven for his hasty suspicions; but it is hard that a young man cannot fit up a room in his cottage for his own mamma without arousing the jealous innuendoes of his neighbours. Certainly Tom and his mother had to thank the prurient sensibilities of the age we live in for the insinuation. And then poor Mrs. Crackenthorpe had been in the village several Sundays, and had not been to church. Why, the little woman might have been a Quakeress, or a Socinian, or an Anabaptist. It seems, too, that she was very indifferent to the opinions of the Vicar and his friends; for she only laughed when she heard it, which she did of course through her maid, and said—"The old fellow is so wicked himself, that he thinks everybody else must be like him." She did wisely, however, to keep it from Tom Crackenthorpe, who honoured his mother above all women, and would certainly have broken the Vicar's head for his stupidity. You see it was only stupidity after all; and the talking (pious man!) about what he did not understand. Some men and women would regard that ignorance of the world as a misfortune; I, on the other hand, am inclined to give it the full reward of merit, as being very rare in these days. So apt, indeed, in such matters is the present generation, that the names of the most

celebrated courtesans are frequently on the lips of matronly women and innocent girls; and their broughams, horses, opera-boxes, and paramours form the staple of much fashionable conversation. Surely it cannot be in the hope that frequent repetition will deaden the sense of our women to little irregularities of husbands and brothers, or that a familiarity with such vices will produce a philosophical indifference to their existence.

Tom's house altogether was a very creditable performance. His friend Sparkes had suggested this, and ordered that, with Tom's cheque-book in view, in such a manner, and so efficiently, that, excepting that the roof was a little uncertain in case of rain or rather heavy snow, that the pump wanted lowering, the drainage re-arranging, several stench-traps putting down, and that there was little or no soft water, and no ready means of catching it, the Box Hall was quite perfection. One or two of the doors gave Tom and his lodger such heavy reminiscences of their original intention, by beating in first the crowns of their hats, and then of their heads, that some rather trite and not complimentary expressions were elicited from them towards the original architect. There were some rats too; but that might be expected from the nature of the place; and Crackenthorpe and Munster were both fond of rat-hunting. It is true that it remains a question whether one's own morning-room is the best place for practice. Tom said not, and got some ferrets, some ground glass, some virulent poison, which he was in deadly fear of his favourite Snap swallowing, and a huge cat, a most effective remedy for the one evil; but which broke all the things that were broken, drank more than sixteen gallons of pale ale in one week, took all the eggs, destroyed several bottles of the best claret (at least they showed the broken bottles, and that number was missing from the bin), and was altogether as mischievous, gluttonous, and, I may say, as drunken a cat, as the best butler or housekeeper could desire. Well, all this was nothing. What a thing it was to be a housekeeper, a voter, a vestryman, an object of ever-increasing interest to the softer sex! and then the stables really were excellent. Not that these two faithful friends, one of whom found the money, and the other borrowed it, contemplated sleeping there themselves. But the stables were, after all, the chief consideration. What have they come to Lushenham for but to hunt? They must have horses, and horses must have houses; and, as the horses did the hunting, their houses ought to be the best. There was stabling for sixteen. At present Tom had four, and Munster had two—that is to say, ostensibly: they belonged to Mr. Curricke, of widespread repute. They had their faults; but part of the science of horsemanship is to find them out, so, of course, no really creditable dealer is so foolish as to mention them beforehand. They

were calculated to carry Robert Munster very well, whose hunting was a bit of a farce, and usually performed at other people's expense; besides, he was not likely to purchase, as we know already, and altogether Mr. Currie knew his customer.

I know the world is very suspicious on the subject of horse-dealers in general. They don't get credit for much honesty: and any liberality (which is on the surface undeniable) of which they may happen to be the perpetrators is always placed to interested motives. You see, when men are purchasing horses, they usually assume a certain amount of self-importance and knowledge of the subject; and if they happen to take in the dealer, and give only 50*l.* for what is honestly worth 100*l.*, I never heard of one of my acquaintance suggesting an increase of demand. I have known an honest and liberal man to say to his son's tutor—"I expect my son to derive even more advantages from your tuition than he has from those seminaries of useful and ornamental literature, Eton and Harrow; and I must therefore at least make your remuneration equal to theirs;" but I never heard of any compact of this nature between the purchaser and professional seller of horses. "You shall give me 20*l.* more if he goes on well, or if you like him," is not a uncommon form of expression, which sometimes ends in merit being justly recognised; but it happens quite as often that the horse disappears, and nothing further is heard of the conditional surplus fund.

Now, I quite believe in honest horse-dealing. I do not mean that a dealer is compelled to say—"This horse is an excellent animal—sufficiently good-looking, and goes well through dirt; he is also an admirable water jumper; but to tell you the truth, he had the influenza in the spring of the year: and, though he shows no sign of the infirmity yet, I advise you not to buy him, as he is pretty certain to become a roarer sooner or later;" or, "This horse I regard as a regular flat-catcher. He has a neat head and neck, good legs and feet, a fine mover, and is, as you see, calculated to make a first-class hack; but he is really not worth 20*l.*; for he is, without exception, the worst doer and the softest brute I ever threw my leg over." But then I never heard the most conscientious of shopkeepers say—"There are a quantity of flaws in this china, which none but a dealer's eye can detect. It's true you don't see them, but there they are; and when you want to part with it, the trade won't have it at any price." Or, "Yes, sir, it is a charming clock to look at, but it won't go any more than North American paper." Notwithstanding this, I think there are honest horsedealers.

"Where are the hounds to-morrow, Drinkwater?" said Munster, about the second or third morning after their arrival, and when it was time to begin the important business of the chase.

"Saltmarsh Bottom, sir; six mile from here, or thereabouts."

"What sort of a country is it?"

"Capital; pretty near all grass, and beautiful fencing country. What will you ride, sir? You've a couple of useful-looking nags; but, Lor' bless me! you never knows till you tries 'em."

"The bay mare with the white foot: she's not so much flesh on her as she might have at the beginning of a season." And Mr. Munster put his hand on the mare's back ribs, at which she gave a gentle squeal and a kick.

"Ay, but she's full of life, if she's short of flesh," said Billy approvingly. "And what's Mr. Crackenthorpe going to ride?"

"Oh! the new horse he bought at the Repository before we went to Wiesbaden, I believe."

"Oh, no! indeed he's not though." And Billy shook his head, and dropped his hands deep into his pockets. "Indeed, he's not, I can tell you."

"And why not, Billy?"

"'Cos I don't intend to let him. If he don't know when he's well off, he must be taught, as Muster Horsman, M.P., told 'em at Stroud. I'm going to ride him first myself, and if he ain't so very bad, why *you* may have a ride, if you like; but not a gent with my master's expectations."

If it be any satisfaction to be put at one's right value, Billy Drinkwater had a way of satisfying most people. Munster was not the least astonished, still less offended, at Drinkwater's plain speaking; and, though he had certainly no intention of riding the kicking horse himself, he was almost proud that he came second only to his master in Billy's estimation. The fact is, Billy regarded him only as some chattel or belonging of Tom Crackenthorpe, and as such gave him precedence over the chattels of other people. Presently Tom himself appeared in the stable yard.

"Good stabling, at all events," said he with a self-complacent nod to his stud-groom. "That's not a very bad box, Drinkwater?"

"It's not a very good one; perhaps it would have been, if there was a little light, and more air with less draught; and, as to the drainage——"

Tom saw it was not a propitious hour, so he asked which horse he could ride to-morrow.

"Well, I'm going to ride the new horse, as you bought before you went away; we've sold Peter; and I'm blest if I think you've a horse fit to carry you."

"What! not Vulcan? Why, he's as hard as iron, and he's good enough for anything. I'll ride Vulcan."

"Dose of physic; leastways prepared."

"Then I have the brown horse. What's his name? Nosegay."

"He'll put you down in that country. You can have the chesnut

Flowerpot, if you like." This was said with some condescension, as if he were granting a great favour. "And mind you don't ride him too hard, sir; he's short o' work since I been away, and he's really a good horse, he is. And as to Mr. Munster, he must get another; he shan't ride him any more."

Here Mr. Drinkwater cut short all further conversation, by saying that Mr. Crackenthorpe must be up in time to ride Flowerpot on, as he'd no hack to put him on; and by walking out of the stable, and putting the key in his pocket.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE MEETING.

It was a very nice morning—for hunting. It was slightly foggy, with a turn of east in a southerly wind. There was not much stirring, and it looked like scent. Of course, novelists can make what sort of mornings they please; and it is a matter of wonder to me that, in describing a hunting-day, they invariably forget that little *soupcou* of east in the atmosphere, which would be sure to give them what they are so seldom able to describe—a run. In the fashionable romances of the day, a hunting-field is a necessary picture, and an accident in the field a certain accompaniment to a hero; but we always get a run on an impossible occasion, and a fall at an impracticable fence. Then he is taken to the right house, and the right woman appears in the right place: he lingers between life and death, and eventually recovers to be the husband of one wife, and the progenitor of many little sportsmen. But if a severe, horrid critic, like——, who really knows what sport is, got hold of the book, and turned up his material, what a pretty figure our fashionable author would cut, in the midst of his fox-hunting zeal! His horses would be reduced to the pace of a quadruped, instead of a steam-engine; his post and rails under five feet six high; and the whole thing, put into form, would be scarcely recognisable by the author. "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*"

It was a fine hunting morning; and Bobby Munster had twice knocked up Cracks from his dressing-room, who was always late, as men of great expectations should be. They breakfasted heartily

—a little rapidly; and, notwithstanding the smell of paint, managed some broiled fish, sausages, eggs, and a slice of brawn. Munster made tea, and asked for the beer at the end of it. They pledged each other in it before starting, and seemed to relish it exceedingly. There might have been a reason for this thirst—or was it only to try the new tap? I like myself to know what sort of beer is kept in a house; but I usually wait until later in the day.

There is nothing further to remark in the appearance of these ingenuous youths, as they mounted their horses and sallied forth, than that Mr. Crackenthorpe was got up with unusual care. He was not a person to take extraordinary trouble about his toilet generally; but his blue neckcloth, well-polished boots, best fitting leathers, and Sunday hat, proclaimed a festival. It may be also remarked that he looked carefully up and down the village, without however, seeing a living soul, excepting the village school-mistress, who not only made a reverence herself to the two scarlets, but was followed by the half-dozen urchins whom she was driving to school. Tom was beginning to be a squire; and his rank was acknowledged by a flock of geese.

A ride to cover is much the same everywhere; so, that the six miles between Lushenham and Saltmarsh Bottom was like every other six miles in the world, when the end is the same, and the pursuers of an average amount of intelligence. They first displayed their capacity on the subject of scent, of which they clearly knew nothing. Here, however, they were on a par with the best part of mankind. Then they turned to their horses; and here they were more at home—that is to say, Crackenthorpe was. Munster's knowledge of horseflesh was, at best questionable; and beyond not being pitched off, or hung up in a tree, he had very little appreciation of the capabilities of the animal that carried him.

"What sort of an animal is that, Bob? You got him from Curricule's, didn't you? He looks a bit leggy."

"If he's half as leggy as his master, he must be an impostor," said Munster. "He's very easy to ride, and lets you blow your nose or light your cigar without trying to slip from under you. Whether he means tumbling or jumping over fences is another matter: I shall find out to-day, perhaps." Here Bob lit his cigar, as illustrative of this remark.

Presently they passed a couple of grooms going on to the meet. "Capital time," said Cracks to himself. "What a fool I was to hurry!"

They were just then overtaken by Billy Drinkwater, on the new horse. He was suspiciously temperate, and most provokingly amicable as yet—not Billy, but the horse.

"I think, amost, we've been taken in with this here 'oss,"



observed Mr. Drinkwater. He usually spoke as if he were a partner in the concern generally, in the stable department especially.

"What makes you think that?" said his nominal master.

"He's a deal too good-tempered for that 'ere lawyer."

A whole flood of wholesome recollections crowded at once upon the brain of Squire Crackenthorpe. Money-lenders, a little shooting, Christmas, parchments, titles, and deeds, with all the paraphernalia, belonging to six and eightpence, thirteen and fourpence, and one guinea; the red tape and unread documents, which he suddenly felt to be the delusive marks of the friendship of old Sparkes, whose name and person conjured up, at the moment, the personification of Old Nick. Grave doubts beset his mind as to whether he ought not to have proposed for one of the girls; and he certainly thought that Munster might have helped him out of the difficulty. "Selfish beggar!" thought Tom. "And Amelia wasn't so bad-looking, after all. Besides, he need only have hung on till the bill was sent in. What fools we were!" Here his thoughts turned upon women; and if scent, horses, and lawyers were impenetrable mysteries, what was to be made of a woman—of one woman, in particular? He wondered he had not seen her. Would she be out? After all, he had not forgotten her. Perhaps she was not so good-looking as he imagined. "I wonder if she ever goes to church?" To be sure, he might have cleared up all his doubts at once by asking his servant; but he really could not.

"No, no! hang it! that will never do. Fancy asking Billy Drinkwater about a lady! or Munster, who probably does not know, and laughs at everything. Most unprincipled fellow, about women, I ever knew; thinks them all as bad as himself."

"Hallo, Cracks!" said young Lawless, riding up at this moment, and greeting his friend with a sudden and hearty slap on the back: "how long have you been down?"

"Only four or five days. I've a place at Lushenham, and haven't horses or anything else. Munster and I have taken it together."

This was certainly true, if being in the same fly, and drinking the same claret, and at the same table, constituted partnership.

"All right, old fellow! Lots of foxes; and Bumby is the right man to give 'em a shaking. He's had some capital sport in the cubbing season, and rattled the covers well. Besides, his country's so wild, that we're sure of sport, if it's to be had anywhere."

"Who are down here?"

"Oh, the usual lot. Boys to open the gates and macadamize the lanes. Half-a-dozen or so that go like blue blazes; and an occasional draft from Pumpington or the Pytchley, who exhibit their animosity in the field to such an extent as to endanger the

neck of the huntsman and the limbs of the hounds, in endeavouring to avoid them."

"Any women out?" inquired Tom, with a faint blush.

"No, thank God! I hate women—that is, out hunting. By-the-bye, there is a Mrs. something or other, like Brandy."

"Likes brandy!" said Tom, *sotto voce*. "Is she pretty?"

"Pon my soul, I don't know! I never looked at her. But that's not her name: that's her mother. She lives at Lushenham, or somewhere, in that direction. Blunder told me, so perhaps it's all a lie."

There was no doubt this was the woman Tom was in search of. He accepted the opening thus given, and called up Billy Drinkwater.

"Do you know a Mrs. Brandy, or something of that sort, living in Lushenham?"

"Brandy? Brandy? Mrs. Brandy, sir?" said Drinkwater, touching his hat. Billy was quite a pattern when he was in what he called *perminctuous* company. "She's a hold lady as lives in the white cottage near the Vicarage."

"Does she hunt, then?" asked Tom, with well-feigned ignorance.

"Hunt? Oh no, sir—leastways, not the fox." Here Billy leered artfully. "It's the young lady—that's to say, she's a widow."

"What's her name?"

"Greystoke; Mrs. Greystoke." Here Billy dropped behind.

"Can she ride, Lawless?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say she can, devilish well; and, consequently, she's always in the way. She won't tumble off, and she won't be hung up."

"I see how it is: you don't know whether she's pretty or no: you're always behind her. Is to-day one of her days?"

"Yes! I should think so. The cattle come about every other day. The boy's light enough, to be sure; and she usually goes home after the first fox. Turn to the right. There they are, by gad! what beauties!"

Tom and Munster scanned the horizon eagerly for the women, and were at a loss when they perceived nothing but hounds.

"Yoick over, Scrummager! Get to him, Bloodynose!" and both Scrummager and Bloodynose, being good hounds, did yoick in and get to him. Then were heard the "clash, clash!" of the whips, and the "toot, toot!" of the huntsman. Presently one hound opened, and then another; then a fine old melodious note, which set all doubt at defiance; and in a minute or two there was a regular "huntsman's chorus" from the whole pack. At this moment, while Tom was contemplating a well-rounded, sym-

metrical habit about a hundred yards a-head of him, attended by a light boy, admirably got up, and proceeding to jog on, in hopes of a full view of his divinity (for it was quite clear that it was she), he was diverted from his purpose by a shrill tally-ho, and within another minute a cheerful hallo, which proclaimed the game on foot. "Go-o-o-o-ne away!" sung out Jack, at the further corner of the cover; and, not to be behindhand, away went hat and habit and about fifty black coats, and half as many scarlets, in pursuit. Tom Crackenthorpe was an enthusiastic admirer of the chase, and though at that moment longing for a view of the lady in front, he sent the spurs into the chesnut, and, catching hold of Flowerpot by the head, drove him along at a pace that very soon began to overhaul the crowd. They were all brought up in the next field by a "Pray hold hard!" the hounds having been forced too far up the hedge-row by some old Pumpington swells of Tom's acquaintance. In the front of the crowd sat the widow. She looked as handsome as ever, and had lost none of her beauties since Tom's absence on the Continent. He had only seen her once before, but she looked like an old acquaintance. She was sitting well down in her saddle, and evidently preparing for a fresh burst, when, turning her handsome eyes in Tom's direction, she caught sight of him. Whether his gaze was a little too full of admiration or not, it is difficult to say; perhaps it was: at all events she turned rapidly away, and withdrew herself from the crowd. Just then the hounds, having been turned to the line, and the huntsman, having got them through the horsemen as well as he could, took to hunting, and in another five minutes our hero found himself in a narrow grass lane, jogging peaceably along, with one eye on the hounds and the other on Mrs. Greystoke, who was doing the same a little in front of him. "Hang the woman! there she is again; and how quietly she rides! Lawless always was a bit of a *farceur*; nothing could be more lady-like." Away they went again; a quick burst of a quarter of an hour, and nothing more was seen of her, till, after a long check, she trotted in among the macadamizers as coolly and as collectedly as if she had never been out of a walk. It was not at all what Tom expected. She had not jumped a fence. Now and then, too, she exchanged a word or a bow with some man whom she knew; but never was anything so indisputable as her modesty.

"What a deuced impudent fellow that Bosville is, to be sure!" said Tom to his friend Munster. "It's quite evident she don't care for his attention. Look at the fool, how he stands there opening the gate. I suppose her groom can manage to do that for her."

"Who do you mean?" said the gentleman addressed, being at

that moment engaged in looking for a gate out of the next field, as the hounds had just evinced a desire to run.

"Why, Mrs. Greystoke, to be sure. Confound those hounds! they're going to run again!" And not yet having acquired sufficient courage to turn away from a run, he was obliged to set Flowerpot going.

The scent was improving every moment, the fences began to get bigger, and the chesnut more resolute; and it ended in a capital thing, with a kill at the termination of about five-and-forty minutes. Amongst the first of the macadamizers Mrs. Greystoke reappeared.

Fine hunting mornings not unfrequently turn to rain. As Tom was riding quietly home, having long dismissed all cares of the chase, and thinking of nothing, he felt a large spot on his nose—then another, and another. Munster had already disappeared with some old acquaintance, most men had jogged on, and there was not a soul in sight. Patter, patter came the rain. On the right was a gate, and a hovel of considerable size; and a streak of broken line of cloud showed that the shower would not be interminable. He was not yet wet; the wind was blowing straight in his teeth. He had one regalia left; it was not cold; and shelter in the hovel would take him home comfortably with a dry skin. Capital idea! He should still be at Lushenham early, and Flowerpot would be none the worse for resting out of the wind. Ideas so good are not to waste themselves on a southeasterly wind. He turned through the gate, and with the easy seat and loose rein peculiar to the highest class of British sportsmen, jogged into the hovel. There sat, unruffled by a single feather, the widow Greystoke, and in close attendance that infernal boy.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

## A PLEASANT RIDE HOME.

THE end of the last chapter saw Tom Crackenthorpe in a rather delicate position. To say he was taken aback is not quite strong enough, for the widow was the last person he expected to see, though the first in his thoughts, and the sight of her nearly knocked him off his horse. Since the day Tom had first seen her at Lushenham, she had never looked more beautiful; and if bright colour, pencilled eyebrows, cleanly cut features, and a fine set of teeth, were any recommendations, the claims of the widow Greystoke were not to be denied. The gentleman, at that moment, did not look his best; indeed, he was no beauty, though a straightforward, manly fellow enough, at the best of times: and there are circumstances which take the shine out of your fast young men. Pumpington life had never exhibited a phase like the present. Tom had always been countenanced in his little flirtations by the men and women of his set. The latter were quite as eager for the fray as he; and, though truth compels me to add he was somewhat of a glutton, there were plenty there ready to give him his fill. He had never been accustomed to wade through difficulties to the wished-for haven, but had rather played the game of "any port in a storm," and run for the nearest. In fact, this was nearly the first time he had found himself in a twelve-foot by six straw thatched outhouse, occupied by a goddess on horseback, and a cupid in top-boots too big for him; and, as the cloud within looked pretty nearly as black as the one without, he was not far from turning round, and making the best of his way off again: nothing but a real waterspout, which began to descend at that moment, wetting the adhesive plaster of his affections, glued him to the spot.

A flattering writer would say that no sooner had he recovered his surprise than she smiled complacently. I am compelled to admit that his unmeaning simper was worthy of the greatest fool in the three kingdoms; and was met, naturally enough, by a timidity which we know to be the peculiar attribute of widows. He essayed to speak, after a silence of five minutes' duration; but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and when it relaxed he got no further than "Rather a wet morning." As it was quite impossible to contradict this meteorological fact, he had it all to himself—as much, indeed, as Mr. Spurgeon in his Tabernacle, or any other asserter of indisputable truths. The

widow looked assent; and young Boots examined the clouds. Another silence, and Tom bethought himself of a question which must elicit a reply. "Did the lady object to the smell of a cigar?" "By no means," replied she—without, however, exhibiting much anxiety to prolong the conversation. Tom carefully unpacked, rolled, and lit a regalia of the most orthodox pattern.

"You were fortunate in reaching this shelter before the shower," said he once more, with the desperation of a man leading a forlorn-hope, and not certain of getting much, if successful.

"And you, too," said she, which might or might not be the case, as the adventure should turn out for Tom Crankenthorpe. He saw it in that light, and replied with a gallantry, the offspring of something beyond even Pumpington—"Most certainly, to have had the pleasure of, a-hem—aw—aw—making—a-hem—the acquaintance." And in went the widow; as when some mischievous schoolboy, on some summer's day, touches with presumptuous hand the slowly emerging snail, no less quickly did she return to that reserve from which she had shown an inclination to come out. Tom was unlucky; for if any of my readers have an idea of the struggle it cost him to get up this not very uncommon compliment, and his anticipations of victory, they have a conception considerably beyond the ordinary run of that faculty. For a really modest young gentleman, who was given to horseflesh and bachelor parties, and who had been accustomed to the playful raillery of the Bulrushes, the Sparkes, and Clara Jones, this was downright purgatory; and as the rain was no longer so heavy, and the approach of the thin streaks of light in the sky proclaimed a total cessation in another minute, Tom was buttoning his coat preparatory to a start, when the lady took the initiative, and saying, "I think it will do now," rode majestically out of the shed, followed by young Boots at a respectful distance.

"Not made much progress, then," said Tom to himself, as he chewed the end of the regalia with increased rapidity, and then rolled it round between his finger and thumb. "What an infernal sell, to be sure! I wonder whether she knows who I am, or where I live? Dash it! what a pretty woman she is! she's so quiet, too! She doesn't think small beer of herself either; however, I like that, rather. Well, I suppose I must go—there's not much use in stopping here any longer. Come up, lazy;" and, giving Flowerpot, who had been indulging in a short nap, a gentle reminder, he also walked out of the hovel, directly in the wake of the mysterious widow. A sort of irresistible impulse urged him to canter on as soon as he was clear of the field in which the hovel was situated, and the nice soft squashy grass by

the side of the road afforded him the opportunity. As women always ride fast along the road, and usually everywhere else, he did not quite calculate upon catching his late companion so soon as he did; for, on turning through a gate at the end of the lane which led through some fields, by a short cut, to Lushenham, there she was, having pulled up, in close confabulation with the boy. Presently that young man dismounted, and proceeded to examine the off fore-leg of his mistress's horse: not being satisfied with the survey, he proceeded to treat the near leg to the same professional examination. Then he put that down, and his mistress rode on a few paces. And then it was evident that, from some cause or other, the neat-looking bay horse was dead lame. By this time Crackenthorpe had reached the boy, who was again behind.

"What's the matter, boy?" said he, pulling his horse into a walk.

"Missus has got a stone in her foot, or sprained her leg, or somethin'; but I've been a handlin' it, and I can't see nothin', sir."

Tom could not very well see any woman in such a strait without going to her assistance: of course it was with some reluctance that he even then addressed her. "If I can be of any service to you, I shall be very happy: your servant says you have a stone in your foot."

"My horse has had, I believe," said she, with a charming smile—"and I am much obliged; you see he can scarcely put his foot to the ground."

"Allow me to give you advice," said Tom, quite emboldened by the change of manner; "if I might suggest such a thing, I should leave the lame horse to the boy, and change saddles immediately. He can come slowly after us." And, in accordance with this advice, the boy was ordered to change the saddles, which he did with Tom Crackenthorpe's assistance, whilst Mrs. Greystoke held Tom's horse. "He won't kick, will he?" And in about ten minutes she was ready to mount. "And now how am I to get up?"

"How do you get up at home?" said Tom.

"There's a horseblock at the front gate."

"There's none here, and I see nothing like it."

Tom was half afraid to propose inspecting the foot, it looked so like presumption.

"Dear, dear! what is to be done?" sighed the widow. "How provoking!"

"If you—you—you would but allow me to—to——"

"Oh! really—dear me! I'm sure I give you a great deal of trouble; but I'm afraid Robert is rather—rather—too short."

So, having made a virtue of necessity, she placed a very small neat boot in the palm of Mr. Crackenthorpe, and one hand on the pommel of her saddle, and was in another moment on her sound horse.

Tom started by her side ; and if anything is calculated to break the ice, it is the caloric that may be raised by the last-mentioned process.

"Now, pray, don't let me detain you, or take you out of your way."

"I believe our roads lie the same," rejoined Tom ; and he thought he should like to have added—"through life."

"Impossible !" said the widow ; "I live four miles from here, and in the very stupidest of places."

"That's exactly my own case," said Tom, with an enraptured smile.

"Surely not at Lushenham?" replied she, with a simplicity, which was, if not the result of long practice, the highest effect of natural genius.

"Precisely. I live in the new house, at the cross roads, formerly inhabited by Farmer Simcox. I am happy to think we are neighbours."

"I am afraid mamma and I are not very gay. Our position prevents us from going out much, or receiving at home ; and I am hunting by order of my medical man."

Here the widow put her hand to her side.

"And you are very fond of horse exercise?"

"I love it to distraction ; but I fear we ladies are often in the way."

"In the way? bless me, no!" said Tom, who had hitherto hated the sight of a woman in the field at any time. "In the way! One of the most charming things in the world is to see a lady enjoying the fresh air, and enlivening the meet by her presence." Tom spoke in raptures.

"But not over fences ; surely you confine us to the gates?"

"That's a university punishment, and one inflicted upon themselves by old gentlemen in the midland counties, in after life. But, really, I can't see why, if a lady likes to ride"—

Tom was lying to such an extent as has never been equalled.

"Well, seriously, I always abstain only upon the principle that we are in the way—*de trop*, in fact—as soon as we leave the road."

"I'm sure I hope you'll discard that notion as soon as possible, and be found in the first flight."

Verily Tom was getting on. Just then they caught sight of Lushenham in the distance, on the banks of the muddiest ditch I ever saw dignified with the name of a river.



"You like Lushenham?"

"Pretty well; it suits us—it's quiet. Charming family at the Vicarage," said she, looking out of the corner of her left eye, but seeing nothing on Tom's face, who knew nothing of the Partingtons. "Charming people; such girls! Ah! you'll see one of them ride some day; and so good-looking."

Tom, never having seen the young lady in question in the saddle or out of it, made no sign. They were within ten minutes' ride of the village on the main road. The clock was striking four. The children were just out of school. Tom's coat attracted the attention which it always demands in that part of England; and as good luck would have it, those of the population who were not on the road were up at their windows. Tom and the widow were making a triumphal entry, if they had known it; and the Prince of Wales and the Princess Alexandra may raise more enthusiasm, but they won't be subject to the same spirit of speculation. The very first couple to be seen coming along the road was no other than the Vicar and his wife, accompanied by a daughter, in a hat that made a four o'clock November's sun just sinking behind the clouds in a yellow vapour look like a poached egg in pea soup. The Vicar, as in duty bound, made a polite bow; but he was not of that race of gentlemen who care to take off their hat, when something short of that ceremony answers the purpose. There is a great deal in a bow; and if you wish to stand well with the women, take care that it be a well-considered mixture of deference and self-respect; not so easy of accomplishment as some persons imagine. If, indeed, a master of the science—a shade of H. M. G. Majesty George IV., or Sir Charles Grandison—would revisit the earth, and compile for Messrs. Chapman and Hall a really scientific pamphlet on the subject, to be launched from Piccadilly into St. James's Street, it might benefit society, by instructing its junior members. I, for one, believe in the utility of the fine old-fashioned, much-abused hat; and if it have no other use, it at least enables a man to bow like a gentleman. It is about the only article of dress that keeps the world in order; and thanks to Providence, it must flourish as long as woman insists upon being recognised in Pall Mall as she should be. Figure to yourself the miserable wretch who seizes his slouched wide-awake by the brim, to droop hopelessly in his raised hand; or the pork-pie of still more modern date by the centre, to drop it, extinguisher-like, upon the same spot from which he has but now taken it. Surely all his hopes of success with woman must be under it, and are put out at once. The notion may appear preposterous, the advice from a bald-headed old gentleman gratuitous or interested; but, depend upon it, the thing to appear in as a gentleman or lady (on horseback) is a chimney-pot. The rest are all adaptations from

the coalheaver, and are miserable subterfuges for a parsimonious economy under the name of comfort. Tom himself knew perfectly well what was right; and he regarded the broad-brimmed, badly-brushed beaver of the Vicar as only too heavy for the arm of its owner. He stared at his parish priest with something like surprise; but he was brought up in too good a school to have recognized any living soul short of the Royal Family without a special introduction.

"Forward minx!" said Mrs. Partington, when out of hearing. "So she's picked him up already. Have you called, Daniel?"

"Called! Oh! yes; last Friday. He wasn't at home; but I walked round the house, and just looked at the rooms. Got some nice things: oh! yes, very."

"You might ask him and his friend to dinner at once, I should think. Don't you expect your friend Simpson? he's a great horseman."

"Certainly; if you wish it, dear. Yes, to be sure, his father kept dogs—setters, or beagles, or something of that kind, to be sure. Bit o' fish, soup, and a saddle of mutton. Capital bottle of claret: '45."

"You told me, '36," said the Gorgon, rolling her eyes at this palpable mistake.

"'36; yes, to be sure, 36 shillings; but it's '48 wine."

"Then I'd rather not drink much '45 wine," said the lady.

By this time Tom and his charge had got to the second group, which consisted of half a dozen village-school children, just released. Their spirits were proportionably buoyant, and, except pulling their forelocks to the big folks at the Hall, and not "sniffing" when the ladies were present, their manners, at the best, were not quite up to the Rosherville pattern: they expressed themselves, unreservedly.

"Billy, here comes the 'unters. My! wot a swell! and he's got a woman 'unter along with him! Oh! shouldn't you like to be him?"

"No I shouldn't; I'd like to be she, 'cos she's the best looking."

"But that's the chap as lives in Farmer Simcox's old house. Arn't he a lot o' tin? that's all," suggested Bill, who appreciated the sinews of existence.

"So it be; and that's his wife?" "Hoor-o-o-o," shouted Bill and his companions, as they escorted the couple about fifty yards down the road.

The next persons they met were Captain Gladwish and his daughter, in a small pony-chaise at a foot's pace. They stopped.

"Well, Mrs. Greystoke! had a good run? I'm sure I hope so, for your sake."

Tom looked silently on.

"Oh! I'm not very enthusiastic, you know," replied the widow lady.

"The most thorough sportsman in the county," said the Captain again, not understanding this sudden depreciation of the character. "I hope you kill'd your fox."

"And how are you, my dear Miss Gladwish?" said the widow to Emily, bent on changing the conversation. "Not afraid of the rain for Captain Gladwish? We have had a sharp shower, and my horse is lamed. We have left him behind with my groom, and this gentleman is so good as to take charge of me."

Tom took off his hat, and Mr. Gladwish addressed an inquiry or two as to the run, and whence he was hunting.

"What! Simcox's old cottage; the château, as it used to be called? Capital quarters. I hope you'll like Lushenham, as I hear you have it on a lease." After a few more words, and a promise to call, if Tom would excuse his getting out, they parted.

"Mother! mother! here come the hunters—quick! My! if there ain't the new gentleman along with Mrs. Greystoke." And old Betty Dibdin hobbled to the window in hot haste after her daughter Sally.

"Ah, there they be, sure enough! and a pretty couple they'd make, Sally."

"Lor'! mother, she ain't fit for the likes of him. She's no great shakes, I'll be bound. Why! Mary Duster told me as they kept the gin in the cupboard and helped themselves; and as to her beauty, I don't take no account o' that, for she got a bit of Rowley's Mekissor, and Dainty-face, I think they calls it, and such like powder and things. Lor' bless you! she's only a painted doll after all."

"Well, he ain't no ways well-favoured hisself, Sally; though he looks like a rale gentleman, he do; and my! what a big ring he's got on his finger!"

"Bless your old eyes, mother, that's the top of his hunting whip! But he is a gentleman, for he gave little Tommy a shilling for opening the gate."

The fact is, he not only gave Tommy Dibdin a shilling; but Sally, who was the belle of the village, received a salute, as she was doing some extra work at the château, one morning, shortly after their arrival. No wonder she was loud in her praises of the gentleman, and no wonder the use of tooth-powder and gin and water came under Sally's strictures as regards the lady. Women will be women, all the world over.

As soon as it was clearly ascertained that Tom and his friend were positively in residence, of course visitors began to make their appearance; for, becoming remarkably regular in their

attendance at church, and paying a very uncommon amount of respect to the platitudes of the Rev. Daniel Partington, not any excuse could be found for excluding such exemplary characters from the visiting lists of the neighbourhood. It is true that from the peculiar calls upon two hunting men, who had now increased their studs to four and six respectively, no very great regularity in returning these visits, or in accepting the invitation, which poured in upon them from the villages about, as well as their own, could be expected. A lame horse and a non-hunting day in each week put in requisition the only fly in Lushenham, and then the visiting was done, *en masse*. Sometimes Crackenthorpe carried a roll of cards; at another time Munster; and if a speculative invitation arrived for both, they generally took it in turns, or tossed up for the pleasure of reconnoitering the ground. Tom justly observed that life was too short for bad dinners and ugly women; and, as they took care that their own *cuisine* should be faultless, to their own mind at least, and as the '44 tap of claret was better than ordinary, it was no great hardship to dine at home after a hard day. The dining out after a day's hunting, excepting with a purpose capable of keeping one awake, is a barbarous custom. Persons of a certain age can have no excuse in the way of obligation, extraordinary company, or equally extraordinary cooking and claret. Young men in a state of somnolent spoonysm are an exception to every rule. I have driven from Oxford to Leamington and back between 4 p.m. of one day and 6 a.m. of the next for a single waltz, and thought myself highly rewarded by the possession of a glove with only three fingers and an apology for a back. A few years afterwards, I ascertained, upon comparing notes, that the thumb and the little finger, with a few extra strips, was in possession of a fellow who lived in the back building of Trinity, and who eventually made her Mrs. Buddicombe. Of course I sent him the pieces.

Well, then! sooth to say, both Thomas Crackenthorpe and his *fidus Achates* were in this state, more or less, before long; and it must be their excuse for a consumption of ecclesiastical muffins and tea, otherwise disgraceful in the extreme. Considering the parsimonious habits of Mrs. Partington, the two gentlemen were wonderfully welcome to a second day's table-cloth, which had been smoothed between the family Bible and three heavy volumes of a county history, and some watery soup. Fowls and bacon and a roast joint, not forgetting the 36s. claret never found such worshippers before. At first came the invitation in due form to meet Simpson, who would talk of nothing but his father's beagles and his own pony.

"Once was a hunting man; fine country round Brighton," said he, "Devil's Dyke an awful place: positively hawful."

"Have you been down it?" asked Tom.

"Not exactly, not exactly; but very nearly so—that is, I've been to the top, and looked down."

Then as the winter got on, and Miss Matilda had been out hunting with her cousin the Bashi-Bazook, and sometimes with a little brother, and sometimes with Mrs. Greystoke, whom it was desirable to keep in good humour on this account, the intimacy increased. The widow was asked occasionally, to make things go off agreeably, at a moment's notice. Then, when not invited, it was curious to a spectator to see how often she happened to drop in of an evening. Tom occasionally dropped into Captain Gladwish's cottage, to entertain him and to smoke a cigar. Mrs. Greystoke was more cautious in her movements there, and if present always made love to the captain. Ever since their first meeting, Tom had improved the acquaintance wonderfully. Somehow or other, the widow wanted advice about her horses; or would Mr. Crackenthorpe mind her man coming up to the château? and then Tom was always ready to come down to the stable. Then he couldn't help walking into the house. Then he sat down. Then he called, carrying Bobby with him as a make-weight; and once he found the widow with a piano open, having seen him making that way, and a tune followed, then a song (at which the lady was, for an amateur, no mean adept); and so the intimacy increased, until old Mrs. Dibdin's idea that they would make a pretty couple became a prevalent notion in many quarters. It is but due to the widow to say that she behaved admirably; and that she had toned down her riding propensities to meet Crackenthorpe's ideas of female propriety.

Hunting about four and sometimes five days a week, with an occasional week's frost, does not leave a great deal to recount. Tom enjoyed himself, and so did the widow: and as often as Mrs. Partington would give her consent, and Mr. Partington the grey, Matilda appeared at the near meets, in a costume which varied with her capabilities of imitation, or the state of the wardrobe. The attractions of this young lady were by no means in themselves despicable; and a very curious piece of information, which gained ground in the village, that she had a something, an indefinite few thousands of her own, left by her grandmother, proved a loadstone strong enough for Bobby Munster. They were not unfrequently thrown out together; and Bobby, never remarkably keen, began to bear these disappointments with even more than his wonted equanimity. The housekeeping at the Vicarage, never first-rate, did not trouble him; and the Vicar pushed on with his 36s. claret and his 27s. port, his tough mutton, and second day's table-cloth, about once a week during the season, with muffins *ad libitum* between whiles. All this time the young lady was

getting deeper and deeper in the mire. Mamma began to surmise, and she went the length of an ogre-like smile to Emily Gladwish, when the name of Munster was accidentally coupled with Miss Matilda. Bobby was quite taken with the bait; and having nothing to do but hunt and make love, he indulged the propensity, as if he had been still at Pumpington. There's great wisdom in numbers. Here she had it all to herself; there were no distractions; and, as the Vicar and his wife were quite convinced of the solvency of a young gentleman with four horses, an elaborate toilet, and a part owner of the charming cottage, furniture, and articles of *vertu*, with which it was fitted, it seemed as if there only wanted a proper time for the consummation to the young people's happiness.

"Tom, we must have a dinner," said Bobby Munster, who was in high spirits, consequent on the receipt of an unexpected remittance.

"Who the deuce ever dreamt of going without?" Tom was just preparing to dress, preparatory to that important meal.

"I mean that we must give Partington and two or three fellows a dinner, who have been civil to us."

"Certainly: and we can ask old Sparkes from Pumpington, and your friend Cutpurse, the money lender——"

"Oh! hang Cutpurse! he won't do," said Bobby Munster.

"Why not? Well, then, we must have him alone," said Tom.

"He's such a dreadful blackguard," rejoined the other.

"You forget the valuable shooting he let us have for next to nothing: we owe him a mount. Billy Drinkwater's been keeping Acheron for him: he won't let any one have a ride till the lawyer has been up."

"Well, then, let's have him down directly. What are you going to do to-night?" asked Bobby.

"I think I shall smoke a cigar after dinner; will you?"

"Why—to tell you the truth, I half promised to take up those views of the Rhine for old Partington to see: he seems very much interested in photography."

Tom chuckled to himself; and when he was gone, slipping into a pea-jacket, he soon found himself at Mrs. Bransby's fire-side.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## PUMPINGTON.

WITHOUT professing violent sympathies with the agriculturists, who always know what is best for themselves, frost is a very useful ingredient in the atmospheric mixture. The fact is, that if one listened to the farmers, one's notions of Providence would be much deteriorated. There never comes the right thing in the right place; and if Providence listened to them, there would come such an amalgamation of rain, snow, frost, heat, drought, and wind, all together, as to spifigate Murphy, and blow Admiral Fitzroy and his theories clean out of the ground. The prevalent notion among them is, that the whole of the habitable globe is of the same texture, and that the expression of a meteorological want or opinion by anyone else is a miserable impertinence. Weather was made for crops, and crops for weather; croppers are quite another thing. Lame horses, over-worked hounds, short studs, and gentlemen with broken collar-bones, or love affairs on hand, are not interesting to any but the parties immediately concerned; and, though a frost may come opportunely enough for these, it never sounds orthodox to sport that opinion.

Impressed with that idea, when Mr. Crackenthorpe rose, and found his sponge imperfectly stuck to the side of his basin, he pondered as to how far he was at liberty to condemn the providential arrangement. He went for safety.

"By Jove! Bob, here's a go!" said he, flourishing a razor, and preparing to suffer that torture which the well-dressed Englishman formerly considered an essential, and which Tom had not yet discarded. "It's a frost."

"So much the better," said Munster from another room: "I shan't get up."

"But perhaps it will give by twelve o'clock."

"Not a bit of it: the wind's north-east; besides, it's just what was wanted."

"I don't see that, exactly."

"I do; all my horses are lame, and two of yours are no better; Flowerpot's dead amiss, and Acheron's tender all over."

"Well, what shall we do? We can't stick here. It's a beautiful morning." Here he stepped into a good warm dressing-gown, and appeared at Bobby Munster's door.

"Come, turn out, old fellow; let's go to Pumpington."

"What! to pay old Sparkes's bill? Not I." And here the gentleman folded an extra piece of clothing over his head, to shut out all further conversation.

Crackenthorpe continued his toilet, trusting to better influences than his own eloquence to move his friend.

In the course of another hour or two they managed to have breakfast, and then the "*ordre du jour*" was read. Pumpington by train, a visit to the Repository, luncheon at the "Prince Regent," the club, billiards or pool, a dinner (*par hasard*), an evening, and—

"Oh! put up something, and let's sleep there; as to coming back with the thermometer 6 degrees below freezing point, it's not to be thought of."

"Very well; and just write a line to Thoroughpin, the dealer, and say I don't want the steeplechaser he offered me for the Lushenham Handicap—that's a good fellow. Did you ever see such a letter as this?—

'Coach and Horses Inn.

'Honer'd sur—I has one hors would suit any gent, he has been steeplechased, is sound, and a good hack, best legs and feet you ever see, not in the stud-book, well up to 8 st. 12 lbs., very fast; price 250 guineas. If you don't have him, I shall keep him for the flat. [Who's he? said Bobby, soliloquising.] Please come and see him.

'Yours to command,

'JOSEPH PIMPLETON.'

"What a nice weight-carrying hunter he'll make when we've finished with him for our game! You don't mean to refuse such a valuable offer?"

"Indeed I do, though, Bobby; so write a line, and we'll be off. There's that fellow Jolly has written to ask me to see him. I want to enter something for Pumpington, if I could get hold of a really good one, and he tells me that it would be a great advantage if gentlemen would call upon him, and talk the matter over."

Tom got up and looked out of window. It was clear, sunshiny, and unmistakably frosty.

Jolly was a most respectable tradesman, a top-boot manufacturer, and otherwise given to the sports of the field. He had become lessee of the Pumpington race-course: and he saw a short cut to fortune by steeplechase handicapping, which set all boot and shoe making at defiance for celerity and certainty. Nothing delighted him so much as a young man with plenty of money and pluck, bent upon buying experience. Jolly had a large stock of the article upon hand, and lost no opportunity of exposing his



wares. I don't know that it was dearer than elsewhere: and he had plenty of customers.

As neither Crackenthorpe nor Munster were yet contributors to a fashionable journal, they found themselves neither inconvenienced by too much attention or curiosity, nor compelled to put up with the patronage or company of a duke on their short journey to Pumpington, and they reached the town without suffering from any incident worth mentioning.

The stroll up the parade at Pumpington was familiar to both gentlemen; cheerful at all times; and on a bright, frosty afternoon, when the sun has already acquired some power, exhilarating beyond expression—let us add, between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Exhilaration beyond that time of life depends chiefly on practical benefit, in which the Pumpington parade is somewhat deficient.

"Who's this, Munster, coming down in pink? he's been out hunting, and just discovered it wouldn't do. *Couleur perd*, as that scoundrel used to say at Wiesbaden, when he swept in our money."

"That's Smith."

"Curious name."

"Well, his is," said Bobby; "look at him when he comes by; that's Dudley Greville Falconberg Smith; he says he's the last of the Falconbergs; it's a devilish lucky thing that the family's extinct. I hope he's not going to perpetuate it."

"What does he do here?" inquired Tom Crackenthorpe, who was absorbed in a contemplation of the gentleman above-mentioned; "he looks like the biggest fool alive—at least, for his size."

"What does he do? Well, he goes out hunting when there's a frost; and at other times he's taken your place, rather. The women say he's the very nicest man in Pumpington."

"I should think he was; but just look at him."

The last of the Falconbergs was certainly one of those imbeciles who exist in watering-places and spas, as the tame lions of society. His face was very pretty: thin nose, drooping lids, excellent teeth, wavy hair, and the tiniest of moustaches, just turned at the end. He was about 5 feet 6 inches in height, had very knocked-knees, brittle-looking feet and hands, and weighed about 8 st. 6 lbs. In dress he was of the Dresden china pattern, be-frilled and be-ruffled and be-jewelled, all in the same way. He was not ill-educated—that's to say, as times go; he spoke French with a tolerable accent, and quite grammatically, which had been taught him by his mamma. He sang Italian songs, and understood one or two of them. Of any classics he was sublimely ignorant, so tender a plant having never been transposed from the domestic

hot-house to a school of any kind. His manners were a mixture of the playful kitten and the overgrown school-girl; and his attention to old women of title, his respect for rank and years, was exemplary. He had ten thousand a year, and spent four; he had a few horses, which he couldn't ride, nor his friends either when they came to their full size; and his great pride, next to his finger nails, was in his *cuisine*. A dinner of Falconberg Smith's was a very good thing.

This young man was a bone of contention in Pumpington in various ways: between the nice, amiable young men who imitated him, and ate his dinners, and took care of him, and the roystering blades, Jack Halston and his followers, who rode over dining-room tables, ran up to town in a frost, had grilled bones and a bishop nightly, and were always being blown up by the masters of hounds whom they delighted to patronize; between the mothers of Pumpington, who caressed him in secret, and pool-pooled him to one another, and who paraded him before their daughters as a sort of pump-room Koh-i-nor; between the fathers and the sons, the former of whom held him up as an example when they heard of his thrifty habits and domestic inclinations, when the latter abused him for his abhorrence of big fences and Hudson's regalias; and, above all, between the young ladies themselves. They scarcely loved him so well as their mammas; but there were not more than half a dozen that wouldn't have been tempted by Mammon. The Sparkeses worshipped him, all of them; the Bulrushes adored him; the Flanigans made slippers and braces for him; and Georgy Biffin, the high-churchwoman of the upper town, stuffed him a cushion and worked a cross upon it for him to kneel upon when he turned his face to the east. There were just half a dozen sensible souls, who did not dislike ten thousand a year, but who did not care for an ass saddled with it. Gertrude Thompson, Annie Lawrie, Violet Fane, and Helen Somerville snubbed him, and were thorns in his side; and Harriet Temple called him a humbug and an idiot; but Harriet was suspected of smoking, and was known to have driven a drag, so that Falconberg Smith was more of a lady than she.

The Club at Pumpington was a pleasant rendezvous. In the lower rooms Bustleton read his paper, Torkington chatted with his friends, young Listless had all the novels of the day, and General Growler cursed the Horse Guards and their examinations, without let or hindrance from his wife and daughters. The Pumpington correspondent of the "Morning Post," and the sporting contributor to the — the, what shall I say? — the "Saturday Review," wrote their articles on club material. Above was the smell of tobacco; short whist, but plenty of it; *carté* and billiards from early in the forenoon to any time in the morning. Here were to

be learnt the most astonishing performances of the first-flight men ; how Sandman's horse had jumped a lane comprising donkey-cart and gipsies ; how Jones's buggy had cleared the turnpike-gate, and nothing hurt but Jones—to be sure, he was killed ; how Vansittart's pony had jumped through the upper panel of his stable-door, and only dropped an eyelash in going through. Here were mysterious hints as to the Unknown, and an offer to take long odds that he was in the room that day between the hours of 3 and 9 p.m.

It was in these jovial chambers that matches, and bargains, and dinners, and steeplechases were made. It was the only place in Pumpington where everybody seemed quite at home, the sort of shooting-jacket and easy-chair of the whole Spa. Whether it was attributable to the absence of our better parts, I can't say. But I know everybody listened to the most extravagant fables, the most unmerciful badinage, the most antiquated of Joe Millers, or the last and best of Merewether, without a contradiction. Everybody laughed, and everybody talked of himself, except half a dozen eager expectants, who backed the *écarté* or whist players with as much joviality and chaff as if Sayers and Heenan had been requiring their services.

As honorary members of this society, both Crackenthorpe and Munster enjoyed the *entrée*.

"Ha ! ha ! delighted to see you, my dear Crackenthorpe, once more among us : bless my soul ; dine with us ; and you too, Mr. Munster. Egad ! how charmed Mrs. Sparkes and the girls will be ! Seven o'clock ; quite a family party ; no one coming but Falconberg Smith."

"Very kind of you ; but the fact is we're engaged. We're only here for a day or two." Tom did violence to his own feelings to escape from Smith.

"Well, come to-morrow, then. There ; it's a hard frost ; no chance of hunting. I'll just ask Halston and Somerville. One more glass of the '44 left." And Sparkes's long nose, starched choker, and well-polished boots looked so hospitable, that no one would ever believe in the bill he sent in to his dear Crackenthorpe for his friendly interference in the matter of the house. By the way, never have anything done by a lawyer under the name of a friend. Let him come like a wolf, then you understand him ; but don't let him feed on your vitals, under the mask of friendship. There are plenty of them very excellent men ; they do their work, and should be paid for it ; but their friendship is exceedingly dear. Crackenthorpe had found it so.

"Hallo, Cracks !" said Halston, arriving at this moment. "Well, Bobby, we heard of your shooting. Infernal scoundrel that Cutpurse !"

"What! do you know him, too?" Munster hardly thought there were two persons so unfortunate as himself.

"Know him?" I should think so. I had the same bit of sporting on pretty much the same terms. Where do you fellows dine?"

Jack Halston, who ran away with Clara Jones and married her, and since found out that the levanting was a sheer act of super-erogation, was here "on his own hook," as he expressed it; having left his wife in a suburban villa for a week. "There's the cleverest fellow here you ever saw—a Mr. Sharp, an electro-biologist, or some such thing; he sends fellows to sleep, and then makes 'em dance and sing, and play the fool, and say the most outrageous things in the world. We'll go and see him to-morrow evening."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Short time."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Dine with me and we'll go together. You must see this fellow. There's a grocer's boy here that's what they call a medium; he told us the night before last what old Bulrush had had for dinner. Cold shoulder of mutton and a baked potato, while the old fellow was describing a delicious salmi to Tom Naylor. He says Parson Golightly's hair is a wig; and that Harriet Temple was eight-and-twenty, and going to be married to Edward Graham."

Here Crackenthorpe looked out of window, and saw that it was thawing; there could be no doubt about it; and here was he wasting his time in Pumpington. "Telegraph for the horses?" Of course he would; and so he did, and determined to see the—shire at Sir Shakesby Somerville's the day after to-morrow. A real Pumpington meet is a great thing to see, and though not first-class as sport, made a pretty diversion for Mr. Crackenthorpe, and his friend.

In the meantime the mesmeriser had made a great sensation.

"Bedad, Cracks, my boy," said Captain O'Brian, suspending operations with the cue, "ye must see him, and feel him, to appreciate him."

"Cursed humbug!" said Growler, which was accepted as slight praise rather than otherwise.

"Something in it, something in it, after all!" exclaimed Sceptic, the new practitioner, diving his hands into his pockets, and squinting through his spectacles.

Smith said, "It vewy extwaordinawy, weally; shouldn't like him to feel his head."

"He'd feel a long time without finding much in it," retorted young Stamp, of the 14th Plungers; at which rather broad remark Smith smiled, blandly. Old Priestly, the rector, anathematized

him high and low; and the younger clergy held up their hands in silent horror at his proceeding—"manifestly the works of the devil." In a word the sensation was great, and that was the object of the advertiser.

'Forty-four claret, if you take enough of it, is apt to produce peculiar sensations with most men. On the evening of the mesmeric performance Jack Halston and his friends had been indulging pretty freely; and though it left them sober enough in the strict sense of the word, still it had brought out the characteristic qualities of each. Halston nearly induced the waiter to stand up to him for five minutes, at about a shilling a minute, before leaving the hotel; Crackenthorpe indulged in a series of "tally-hos" and view-hallos, of different kinds; and Munster exhibited such a latent taste for practical joking, as to have bonneted two mild-looking gentlemen on the way, and to have sent a policeman in search of a loose donkey, which had found its way on to the pavement at the top of the Parade. As he justly observed, upon a remonstrance, "if he doesn't find several, it will be the first time in my life that the place has been free from them at this hour."

In these remarkably good spirits, having turned down one street and up another, they arrived at the room set apart for such entertainments. It was very large, quite full, and admirably lighted. All the aristocracy of the town, and a little of the country, were already present, and Mr. Sharp was just about to begin. There, in the front seats, were the Sparkeses, and the Bulrushes, the Joneses, and young Falconberg Smith, with a few of his followers; and on the other side was the strong opposition of jovial middle-aged fathers and mothers, your steeplechasing fast young fellows, and the independent girlhood of Pumpington. There was an Irish peer, of only moderate means, with a daughter now past mark of tooth; two baronets, one a recent importation from some West Indian property, where he had lived all his life; two or three cavalry officers, an imbecile honourable, a physician, and the scientific sceptics, who were to come to be convinced, of course. Everybody was in a fever of impatience; and as soon as Crackenthorpe, Halston, and Munster had taken their places, a red-headed gentleman, with a portentous beard, and calling himself Philip Sharp, Esq., F.R.S., A.S.S., F.S.A., came forward in an elaborate shirt-frill, and addressed the audience.

"Ladies and Gentlemen"—but I need hardly take my reader through the intricacies of electro-biology—magnetism, mesmerism, and spirit-rapping. Every one knows how remarkable are its phenomena, and how palpably they bear the impress of truth. He directed their attention to the facts elicited by Dr. Elliotson, Baron Dupotet, Mr. Hare Townsend, and a few other great practitioners. He said a great deal about "cerebro-spinal centres,

and the respiratory and muscular systems;" and compared them with the "hypothesis of nervous fluid, influenced by extraneous volition;" with a few other little phrases of that kind, which prove clearly that the devil is a great master of the English language, if he is nothing else. The scientific shook their heads, the women trembled, and the scorners only kicked one another under the seats, and wondered how the Professor's teeth felt after that last jawbreaker." There could be no doubt in his mind that the age of miraculous power had not yet passed away. And if a wooden-legged table could be made to dance a reel with a kitchen dresser, there was nothing very extraordinary in seeing a natural cripple assume his just proportions under its influence; if ignorant people were enabled to read the contents of a letter through half-a-dozen sealed envelopes, it was not extraordinary that gentlemen of education should be compelled, in a state of somnolency, to describe their own peculiar feelings, as well as those of others with whom they are *en rapport*; and if they can be taught to forget their own names, homes, and existences, and assume the names and idiosyncracies of other people, it is not remarkable that they should be capable of giving a correct and authentic account of people, places, and circumstances which belong to quite another planet. "In fact, ladies and gentlemen," concluded this very free and easy, and rather good-looking professor of the black art, "I shall be able to show you persons this evening unknown to me, but known to yourselves, under every degree of mesmeric influence, from the highest intelligence to the most hopeless state of idiocy, and which can be induced and dissipated by my will." "Now, ladies and gentlemen," resumed this modern necromancer, after a pause, "I shall show you at once something inconceivable to the unenlightened. I am a stranger here, comparatively, having had but some half-dozen evenings. But there is a certain Mr. Box who is peculiarly susceptible, so much so that I can bring Box to me at any time or place by simple volition. Is Mr. Box here to-night?"

"Yes," said a cheerful voice at the further end of the room, which was immediately followed by a scuffling of feet, and the elevation of a very stupid face, and rather a dirty one.

"Now, Box, resist if you can."

Box endeavoured to get out at once, of course; but, not succeeding with that alacrity which he had shown on former occasions, Mr. Sharp got alarmed, and again invoked him.

"Come, Box, why don't you come, sir?"

"Cos this 'ere young 'ooman's petticoats won't let me."

But whether Box at that moment heard the chink of a half-sovereign or not, we can't say; we only know that, with his eyes wildly glaring at Sharp, he made his rush, and he went down the

length of the room at such a pace, that when he reached the platform he caught his toe in the top step, and fell head foremost into the pit of Professor Sharp's stomach, doubling him up and grassing him at once.

"There," said he, when he got his wind again, "that's a power of attraction seldom seen to such an extent. Sit down, Box, and go to sleep immediately."

Box almost snored.

"Such is the power of science," said he, pointing to the slumbering imbecile; but whether he meant his own or Box's was never determined. Then came an invitation to any gentlemen to present themselves for experiment; and about twenty of all sorts made their way to the platform, where a sufficiency of seats was found for their accommodation.

"Will you go, Tom, if I do?" asked Munster, with a sobriety of voice which belied his sensations.

"To be sure I will," said Cracks, who felt inclined for anything. "Come along, Halston."

"Not I," said Jack; "I'm deuced near asleep already. I'll stop and dream here."

Meantime Box was put through his evolutions. He laughed and cried, was ordered to feel hot, and got all his clothes off, excepting his trousers, which were kept on by the Professor shouting—"All right, Box!" who returned to his ordinary senses and temperament, until he was ordered to feel cold, when he shivered, and, after rolling himself up under the steps of the platform, set light to the tails of his coat in warming himself at the candles. He fought the Professor as Heenan, and, fortunately for that gentleman under the influence of Mesmer, missed all the upper cuts. He sang a song in his sleep on the subject of one George Barnwell, which commenced in a sufficiently lugubrious manner, but which was becoming so exceedingly lively towards the third or fourth verse that the Professor was compelled to shout—"All right, Box!" to save the credit of his performance with Mr. Falconberg Smith and the young ladies of the party; and he drove a team down the steps of the dais, and upset it in the lap of fat Mrs. Purvis, who sat in the front row. The would-be coachman was, however, woke up this time by a regular nose-polisher from Purvis himself, a sceptical grocer of six feet two, and weighing some sixteen stone, who added a word of advice, in which "infernal humbug" was easily distinguishable. Box did not go to sleep that evening—on that side of the room at least. As Professor Sharp came along the line, making passes with his hands down this man's face, squeezing the temples of that, and turning the eyelids of a third inside out, it occurred to both Crackenthorpe and Munster that they had seen something very like that face

before. Munster avowed as much; Cracks, resolutely bent on not going to sleep, took less notice, and was shortly dismissed as an incorrigible wide-awake, with several more. Half-a-dozen remained on the platform in various attitudes of profound repose, and, strange to say, Bobby Munster himself, among them, was at length caught napping. No one who knew him, or rather who did not know him very well, could have believed it possible that he could have looked so sublimely idiotic. He was no great beauty, but deficiency of brains was not the characteristic of his physiognomy.

To a close observer, as Mr. Sharp advanced along the row of the seven sleepers, a look of surprise and a certain hesitation of manner might have been observed when he stood opposite Crackenthorpe and Munster. He recovered himself immediately, however—not before he detected an irrepressible desire to laugh in the face of the latter. He regarded it as a good sign, and, as we have just said, Crackenthorpe was sent back, and received in congratulatory folds of crinoline on his presence of mind, whilst Munster remained as a very promising medium on the platform.

After several antics of the same fashion as those of Box by various young men, who had all seen Professor Sharp for the first time, of course, and with whom there could be no possible collusion, he called upon our friend Bob.

“This gentleman is a stranger to me.”

Here Bobby opened his eyes, and almost winked; however, he refrained from unseemly merriment, either from his devotion to science or his respect for his audience.

“What is your name, sir? Speak out, if you please.”

“Munster,” replied our friend, cheerfully and audibly enough.

“Are you a native of Pumpington, Mr. Munster?”

“Not exactly.”

Bobby began to think of the judge and jury, or his friend Mr. Hall and the Bow Street police court.

“Be so good as to close your eyes—quite close. Thank you.”

He paused a moment, walked to him, lifted the lids.

“See any green?” said Bob.

The people laughed, and the Professor pressed his hand closely upon his head, where he held it. In a minute or two he said—“I think you stated your name to be Munster. Do you recollect your name, sir, now?”

And he drew his open hand sharply down within six inches of his face. Bobby was silent; and the company, Cracks among them, opened their eyes and ears with curiosity.

“What is your name, sir?”

“Sparkes.”

“Where do you live?”



"Pumpington."

"What are you?"

"A flat-catcher."

"What's that, sir?"

"A lawyer," replied the medium.

"What do you feel? what are your sensations?"

"Like the biggest thief in England."

Here there was another round of applause, at Sparkes's expense, in which, however, much to his credit, Munster did not join.

"Be good enough to come to me." Munster didn't move.

"Come, sir, you must come. You shall come."

The Professor seemed quite as much in earnest as his medium, who closed his fists, strained his muscles, and stood apparently with some difficulty rooted to the spot.

"Do you see that, sir?"

"Yes," said Bob again, with his eyes as closed as ever; "I do."

"What is it?"

Here the Professor held up a large envelope.

"A woodcock," replied Bobby.

"I call it a letter. So I am disappointed, ladies and gentlemen, this time." And he began to explain the differences of partial or perfect somnambulism, clairvoyance, *hellschen* (very improper language, as young Weby the curate remarked to old Mr. Drinkwater the churchwarden), and *allgemeine klarheit*, or perfect lucidity.

"So do I see a letter, but I see inside it too," said Bobby.

"Ah! Mr. Munster, and what is it?"

"A long bill, a lawyer's bill, or a coachmaker's, I can't see which," said the medium.

"Will you state the amount?"

"Seventy-five pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence; and the name 'Sparkes,' to be sure. I wrote it myself; and very much ashamed of myself I am."

"Bless my heart! ladies and gentlemen," said the Professor, with well-feigned bewilderment, "this is the most extraordinary case of pseudo-identification I ever witnessed; he still thinks himself Lawyer Sparkes, wherever he may be."

"Right sir!" roared Mr. Sharp.

Bobby was himself in a moment.

"Who are you?"

"Munster of Ballynahinch."

"And what do you see, Mr. Munster, now?"

"One of the greatest impostors I ever set eyes on," said Bobby, opening his eyes, and staring at the Professor.

The company rose with one accord, a gentle hiss expanded into a prolonged execration, the back benches began to yell, the ladies

made a rush for the door; and, just as the excitement was becoming serious, Mr. Sharp made a sudden dive through a door in the back of the platform, and was seen no more. Munster and Crackenthorpe found themselves in the street. "Bobby, I'm going to hunt to-morrow; now, as your horses are lame, I'd advise you to cut it; for it's just possible that you and the Professor may figure in the police-sheet, unless old Sparkes insists upon behaving like a gentleman, and shooting you both. At all events, I'd advise you to go; for you'll be very bad company in Pumpington for the next day or two, at all events."

"You're right, Tom: but I couldn't resist the inclination."



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MISPLACED CONFIDENCE.

WHEN Tom Crackenthorpe proceeded to make his toilet for Sir Shakesby Somerville's meet, it was curious to observe the care he bestowed upon it, and the different result produced from that which rewarded his exertions on the first morning's hunting in Mr. Bumby's country. No man knew better the distinction between Gorsehamptonshire and Pumpington; and the provincial adornment of his person for the latter might be considered a test of his appreciation of its depth and dirt. Even to his horse the same marked distinction might be observed.

"A good, coarse, ordinary-looking beast, that looks lost without the pole-chains, will do for that country," said he to his man Billy; and, accordingly, Mr. Drinkwater sent over the brougham-horse, a useful animal, and in good condition—for macadamizing.

"Leathers?" said Tom, soliloquising—"not on any consideration. We must be in what they call a bottom before the end of the day—and it's chiefly red clay—looks like tripe and tomato-sauce." Then he turned over the portmanteau, which had arrived only that morning. "Yes, that's right, the old black coat; quite good enough for these duffers. Ah! here's the breeches; them's the jockeys for Pumpington," continued he, surveying with great satisfaction, some dark strong cords, which smelt strongly of Moumouth Street, having been really laid in stock for bog-shooting

in Ireland. "Can't do them much harm; and I shan't be mistaken for a Pumpington swell. By Jove! how comfortable they are, after all. Come on," added he, apostrophizing an old boot, which hung fire for a minute; "come on,—you've been this road before pretty often. Now for the choker. Let's see—no; that's too neat. White! ah, white it must be, after the G—— S——'s pattern! Little too much of the church about it too; high-class clergyman, eh? No; I think the breeches will settle that point. Come, that's not so bad, after all! I wish to goodness I had a neat gaiter now, instead of these brown boots; nothing like a neat gaiter for doing the rough like a gentleman, I do believe," said Tom, buttoning the penultimate button of his dark-checked waistcoat, and preparing to descend. "Never saw a man jump a fence in a pair of gaiters in my life; I wonder how it looks?"

I hardly see the reason for this inconsistency of the upper man with the lower in these sporting matters; yet, true it is, they are in vogue with the best men—

*"Ut turpiter atrum,  
Desinat in pisces mulier formosa supernè."*

And so far from laughing when they behold, our friends applaud it. However, there was Tom Crackenthorpe, looking like a bum-bailiff going to a prayer-meeting, or a parson about to enact a bum-bailiff; and having swallowed his breakfast, he went into the stables of the "Prince Regent," to get on Busy Bee, the famous brougham-horse in question.

"I wonder whether that ass, Mr. Falconberg Smith, will be at this place or not?"

Just then Smith rode by on the very neatest of light-weight carriers, dressed in the pink of fashion, and looking as little like Tom Crackenthorpe as can well be conceived.

"Well, that's a comfort," said Tom; I flatter myself we shall be known apart."

Just then Old Sparkes passed.

"What in the world's he doing down here at this time of day?" thought Tom, tightening his girths. "Oh, I forgot, it's a late meet, so it is; and he's been committing a robbery betimes. By-the-bye, I'd better ask him at once to Lushenham, or he'll think I'm concerned in that fool Munster's performance. There's lots of time; I'll call as I go up."

So Tom mounted the Busy Bee.

"How are you? how are you?—delighted to see you. Come in for ten minutes—plenty of time. Come in and say 'How d'ye do?' to Mrs. Sparkes, and have a glass of her orange-brandy—famous stuff!" said old Sparkes, smacking his lips; "and she'll be quite offended if you don't come in."

So Tom got down, and surrendering himself to Sparkes and his fate, and the Busy Bee to an incompetent Buttons, he found himself the centre of a very attractive circle.

"My dear Mr. Crackenthorpe," said Mrs. Sparkes.

And the whole family and party plunged at once into the weather, and the intended procession from the Bricklayers' Arms to the Paddington Terminus.

"Mrs. Sparkes, I hope we shall persuade your husband to come over and have a day at Lushenham. I can manage a capital mount for him, and a bed; or, as we hope to have some steeple-chases later, I think he may prefer that."

"Really, you're very good, very good. You know," and here the lady giggled, hysterically, "Sparkes is entirely his own master. I'm sure it's very kind of you, and—and—Pa, dear."

"My love?"

At this juncture Sparkes straddled into the room, a very Winkle of propriety in costume; white cords (that's the real old jam), white tops, striped waistcoat, checked neckcloth, and bright scarlet coat, unconscious of mud or stains.

"My love," said she, smiling on all around, here's Mr. Crackenthorpe hopes you'll go to Lushenham; he offers a mount, and all sorts of good things, and you *are* to go."

Had any one seen the "aside" she cast at him, they would have understood that he was to go.

Amelia appeared in the doorway, booted and spurred.

"What! are *you* going?" said Sparkes, evidently quite astonished at this new vision.

"Of course she is, Mr. Sparkes, unless you've some particular objection."

"Only, my dear, that the—the—bay mare's not quite sound, and——"

"Fiddle-de-dee, Sparkes; the bay mare's quite as sound as yourself, I've no doubt; and the lady again gave him the benefit of both eyes—barrels I was about to say—in the waistcoat.

"You mean, dear, that the bay mare's the better horse; however, we'll manage. What with Crackenthorpe, and Smith, and Halston, and old Grumbleton, it's hard if I don't find some one to take care of Amelia."

The latter part of this sentence the old gentleman muttered to himself. It is but justice to Amelia to say that, beyond looking at Falconberg Smith and Tom Crackenthorpe, she took no part in the discussion. She was trying to make up her mind—a large parcel. When five or six people have to get on as many horses, with a shortness of hands in the stable department, it takes a few minutes more than is calculated on. When a lady is of the party, the difficulty is increased. Amelia first forgot her handkerchief;

then had odd gloves, which had to be changed ; then was nearly pitched on to the other side of her horse by Mr. Smith, and had to be pushed back by the gardener, to whom this process of propagation was new ; and finally lost at least five minutes in adjusting a refractory stirrup, which had been last used by her short-legged friend Patty Blenkiron. Falconberg Smith found her a pin, and Tom Crackenthorpe affixed to her habit a small bunch of violets. In this form they started for Shakesby Court.

Shakesby Court was a very nice place, seven miles from Pumpington. There was not a woman at the Spa who could not have directed you safely to it, and who would not have taken it with all its incumbrances. It was really a very good house, newly built by the reigning baronet. Its woods and glades were the talk of the town at the present time ; and its beauties enhanced by the certainty of finding a fox in them. Towards this centre all the energy of the Pumpington party was directed. No sooner had they quitted the small round stones which enliven the dullest equitation with the hope of lameness or a fall, than the young lady started at what she would have described as a gentle canter. Of course she took the middle of the road, leaving the greasy turf on the side to her suite. It had the advantage of two days' frost and two hours' thaw, and was not the safest ground in the world for a fall. However on they went. Amelia rode a horse of her own ; her father a cob, which would not be wanted again for a day or two ; Jack Halston, his favourite hunter ; and Tom Crackenthorpe the only one that he had. Mr. Falconberg Smith had only three horses out, so that it behoved him to be particular about pace. She neither slackened rein, nor drew bit, till she arrived at Shakesby. Tom's horse was in for a good baking, and he swore that should be his last ride with Amelia Sparkes. Let us see what the rest of the party had to say to it.

Old Sparkes had but one object in view—the getting rid of his daughter. He did not object to it for the day, but preferred it for good. He had made up his mind that some one else should ride with her through the run ; but whether Smith or Crackenthorpe were the most eligible party he was at a loss to say. At any rate, Smith was the man more easily caught of the two. Amelia herself was in a very comfortable frame of mind, and would have accepted either. Of course she had a preference, but it is not necessary to state it. She was a fine showy-looking girl with nerve enough to have tackled Smith himself ; and I know nothing so difficult to manage as a fool. But she really liked Tom the better of the two, and preferred Bobby Munster to either of them. She attributed the evening at the electro-biologist's to supernatural influence, and was not disposed to be hard on his talents in a social point of view.

Tom was spoony, but not hopelessly so. He had occasionally drunk out of the same cup, and had even eaten out of the same plate, and acted the donkey ; but he was not past recovery, and counter-irritation was doing great things for him : the widow was a sort of intermittent blister. Mr. Falconberg Smith was desperately in love, far the best match, and his ample fortune was worth two of Crackenthorpe's ; for he never would have spent two-thirds, and the other would have managed to get through at least five-fourths of his income. Besides which, dear Falconberg was such a "domestic creature," as Mrs. Sparkes called him ; and certainly gave one the idea of an early specimen of the gorilla tribe, caught young, and easily domesticated in the zoological gardens of social life.

Falconberg Smith himself, though in love, was in a lazy state between matrimony and permanent desertion. As he was not in debt, a rapid flight would have settled the first, and have been the natural forerunner of the second. Not having taken either plunge, we have him with us to-day as an attendant cavalier.

"Very nice person—Sir Shakesby," said Amelia Sparkes, "and waltzes deliciously."

"Ya-as," said Smith, and pulled up his collars.

"Not a bad fellow," said Tom, aloud—"selfish beggar !" *sotto voce*.

And so he was. He was one of those naturally self-indulgent men who get everything that is to be got out of their friends at as small a cost of personal inconvenience as possible ; and, from a swaggering habit of spending quantities of money entirely upon themselves, have acquired the name of "capital fellows !" They are the very pests of society. With plenty, they are always suggesting extravagant amusements to their friends who can less easily afford them, and are never known to pay anybody's share but their own. Sir Shakesby was never known to say "no" to anything. He went everywhere, and did everything, very jovially and very carelessly ; and he never returned a favour or did a kindness in his life that he could possibly avoid. He was a rollicking blade, always in want of something ; always ordering this, that, and the other—cigars, whips, champagne, and jewellery—and sending them to Shakesby Court, where they formed part of an extensive domestic collection.

Once a year, as Sir Shakesby never omitted an opportunity of dining or sleeping in the best houses in Pumpington and its neighbourhood, he found it necessary to give a *set-off*, and he thought the most economical method was to have a late meet of the hounds and a great breakfast ; where very moderate gooseberry performed the part of Moët or Clicquot, and at which he was quite sure that two-thirds of his guests would be satisfied with

walking into his house and admiring the pictures. Heavy breakfasts are quite gone out of fashion; and when men require jumping powder it is customary to make the cartridge as small as you possibly can. Not to be there, however, and not to be seen at Sir Shakesby's, was to be nobody; and to be nobody at Pumpington was a crime of which few of the dwellers in that charming city would knowingly have been guilty.

The present was one of these festive occasions. Everybody, men and women, who could be considered on the visiting-list, got off their horses: and half the cads of the county were present earning honest sixpences and shillings for once in their lives. The Sparkes party, of course, as part of the legal adviser and agent of the baronet, arrived in great form; and Smith and Crackenthorpe were greeted on their arrival with that joyous hilarity which really meant—"Well, here you are, and make the most of it; you won't owe me much if you finish the table. But I'm Sir Shakesby Somerville, and don't mean to be proud. Sit down, old fellow, and have a kidney. Glass of Champagne, Smith? Join us, Cracks? Mr. Sparkes do me the favour to take care of your daughter. Hopkins, tea to Miss Sparkes directly; and see that the servants are taken care of when the hounds arrive." The fact is, that if a man has sufficient courage to be thoroughly self-indulgent with one hand, and will shake his fellows heartily with the other, he may be member for any county in England. If a man lives like a screw, and wears a threadbare coat, in order to give funds to the county hospital, to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, the world will profit by his liberality, and raise a monument to him when he is dead; but they won't give him a vote while living, and will prefer that young spendthrift, whose uproarious mirth and discriminating generosity have made him a roaring lion out of a golden calf. Money must be spent; and if you want the world to see that it is so, you can't do better than make yourself the recipient of your own bounty.

In the course of an hour or so the rosy gills of the gentlemen and the diminished clatter of plates gave unequivocal notice that the business of the day was nearly over, and the play about to begin. "One more glass, Tippler, and then we'll join the ladies," said Sir Shakesby to a gentleman who had got through about half his usual allowance. "It's the dog pack this morning, I rather think," rejoined Tippler, attaching himself still to his champagne, and ignoring the delicate hint conveyed in the invitation to drink. However, as there were plenty there who were heartily sick of the coffee-room, and anxious for the fray, Tippler was in a minority, and the majority rose from the table at once. Then came the usual "one more glass of sherry," or "a trifle of that cherry brandy, just to settle the pigeon pie," and everybody was involved

in hunting the beaver. The style of Pumpington hat worn at the cover side by men and women is sufficiently diversified in form to simplify this investigation. There was no necessity for trying half a dozen Lincoln-and-Bennets, or Locks, or Chapinan-and-Moores, or Andies, to ascertain which was the right fit. The worst accident that could happen was the possibility that Mr. Smith might have changed pork-pies with Miss Jones, or that Miss Fakeaway's round wide-awake, having been accidentally spoiled of its feather, might find its way on to little Captain Buggins's head. Beyond this casualties were impossible. In a very few minutes the guests were mounting their horses, and the host was inspecting the half-dozen of champagne which Mr. Hopkins asserted to be all that remained over and above those which had been drunk. He had forgotten another odd half-dozen that was lying accidentally in a cupboard in the housekeeper's room.

Falconberg Smith had found his groom, and his hunter, a new one, and one of the very best-looking horses out — as indeed he ought to have been for the money. He looked ten per cent. better for the champagne he had drunk; and as he was scrupulously correct in all his habits, this morning's potations were not without their effect. A seasoned vessel like Tom Crackenthorpe had nothing to regret but the plebeian appearance of himself and Busy Bee, by the side of so much elegance as that of his companions. I forget whether I mentioned a slight stammer as a peculiarity of Smith; if not, it's worth noticing, as giving a character to some of his remarks, and as a dead lock to love-making, on which he was evidently bent. It was not long before Tom was made to understand that he was *de trop*.

"Very nice horse that of yours," at length said Tom, by way of joining a little in the conversation, which had been carried on rather after the *sotto voce* fashion.

"I gave Grimsby three hundred for him," said Smith, hammering away, and rather impeded by champagne in his utterance. "He calls him Sus-sus-sustulit: rather a curious name, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is a curious name. He's not an Italian-bred 'un, is he?" said Crackenthorpe, eyeing Sustulit with considerable envy.

"No, not that I know of," replied his owner, quite abroad at the classical allusion. "You see Smith's was the modern school of education.

"Not much of a Roman nose either," added Tom. "What an extraordinary name!"

"Grimsby christened him — I didn't. He said he called him so because he came from Tollit; but I don't know what he meant."

"Oh, comes from Tollit, does he?" said Tom, suddenly bright-



ening up, with a curious twinkle. "Comes from Tollit? then I know the horse, and I'll tell you really why they call him Sustulit—because he 'lifts' so infernally. Sustulit's the Latin for a kicker."

The last of the Falconbergs turned a shade paler, and Amelia Sparkes followed suit. At that moment toot-toot went the horn; and as the servants galloped past with the pack, and the field set their horses into quicker motion, Sustulit gave a bound or two of satisfaction, much to his owner's discomfort, and to the credit of his own name. Not a bad shot of Tom Crackenthorpe.

Having subsided into himself, the horse once more allowed a little playful badinage to take place between his rider and Miss Sparkes. Of course the old gentleman had got out of the way. Halston and the others of the original party had sought other pleasures than the delicate eloquence of Mr. Smith. Tom alone remained; and the champagne—that stimulator of the imagination—had called up before his mind's eye the past and the future, to the exclusion of the present.

"Amelia!" sighed Smith.

The fortunate possessor of that name looked away.

"Now it's coming," thought she—"Mr. Smith."

"Why-why-why so formal? Why not Dud-dud-dud——"

"Oh! indeed, I can't. I—I—ought not to—there, then, Dudley!"

Tom was well in front, a couple of lengths, and wondering how he should get away without appearing to do so. There was a fence in front of him, and a gate a hundred yards to the left at the bottom of the wood. The field was going through the gate, and thither Amelia and her lover were sure to wend their way. Good easy souls! they saw neither gate nor fence. Smith saw a woman, and Amelia saw ten thousand a year beside her.

"Yes, dearest Amelia! let me tell you now"—[At that moment Cracks went at the fence]—"in the sol-sol-solitude of this gay crowd, how much I lo-lo-lo—wo-ah! gently!"

They were close to the fence, without seeing it; and as the Busy Bee lit safely on the other side of it, Sustulit rushed straight for the same place. The horse stopped short, and Falconberg Smith shot headlong into a ditch four feet deep, and quite full of water. Having safely deposited his master, Sustulit jumped the lot at a stand, and cantered after Crackenthorpe.

As the hounds were not running, there was no lack of assistance and condolence; and when the unconscious Narcissus, who had looked at himself in the water, was dragged out, he was overwhelmed with advice and sympathy. Nobody laughed; it's not the thing to do. Nobody broke silence for a second, until that irreverent Jack Halston exclaimed aloud:—

"What are you laughing at, gentlemen? such an accident might have happened to any of us, you know. Bless my soul if it isn't Smith! Dudley, my boy, what have you been doing in the water? You must have got your feet wet." They were the only parts of him which had not been thoroughly immersed. "You'd better go home at once; 'pon my soul you had. You'll catch your death of cold if you stay here. Here comes his horse."

"Amelia," said Sparkes, "you've had enough riding; perhaps Mr. Falconberg Smith won't mind taking charge of you?"

"Not at all—delighted!" said he, chattering as if he'd the ague already. "Where's my horse, stupid brute?"

"I told you what a brute he was," said Tom, bringing him through the gate. "There, jump on mine. I know this fellow; send mine to Prince's stables when you get home. Come up!" said Tom, halloing at Sustulit, and hurrying away from the scene of action. "The Busy Bee will keep you warm, if you only go home a swing trot; it's about what she's fit for. Dash it! it is a nice horse to sit upon. Now for a run."

Dudley Greville Falconberg Smith was too much astonished to refuse, and too cold to finish his offer on the road home; but a fortnight later Amelia at an at-home got him up to the mark; and she keeps Mr. Falconberg Smith in pretty tidy order up to this day.

Tom liked his mount exceedingly, and paid some well-merited compliments to Mr. Smith's groom.

"Is my horse come in?" said he, on reaching the hotel.

"Yes, sir; some time ago."

"What did Mr. Smith say of him?"

"Didn't see him, sir," said the ostler: "see the stud-groom, sir."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Said he never saw such a brute in his life. His master was so tired with pulling at him, he fainted when he got him up stairs."

"Order me something to go to the three o'clock train tomorrow. Why is Mr. Smith here without his nurse?" muttered he to himself, stamping the mud off his boots at the door of his hotel.

The next thing was to see Mr. Jolly; what could he have to say? So Tom performed another elaborate *toilette*. He was determined to propitiate Jolly; so he adorned his person with the very tightest-fitting trousers in his wardrobe.

"Well, they do look as if I wasn't to be done easily," muttered he to himself. "They'll wonder how I ever got my feet into them: I didn't put 'em on over my head either," added he, surveying them complacently. "These lace-up boots, too, give a

good deal of size to the feet; though buttons are rather more horsey."

Tom Crackenthorpe had made up his mind that an easy way to popularity with the farmers of Lushenham and its neighbourhood was by a steeplechase. Everybody would have a chance of riding over his friend's wheat: so that the foxhunters would have no pull in that respect, and, if it was but wet, they might hope to do some damage. As to the gentlemen, as long as they were able to put in a horse or two at the finish of the season, they ought to be satisfied; and a horsedealer's stake would bring out some young ones for the next hunting season. Tom was remarkably green in these matters, and much too honest for the game he had in hand.

There are two kinds of steeplechasing. The first is a good, wholesome, legitimate sport, calculated to improve the breed of horses and of men; that is to say, if horses are trained to run over a country like that round Lushenham, with about 12 st. to 13 st. on their backs, they will be good weight-carrying hunters, with a turn of speed, if not quite thoroughbred. They will be very serviceable horses to gentlemen who wish to be carried safely and speedily over Leicestershire or Northamptonshire. So thought Tom Crackenthorpe, in his simplicity; and such he determined should be the conditions of the Lushenham meeting whenever it should take place. He didn't think much of the difficulties of his undertaking; for, having heard much of this sort of conversation from his friends, he very naturally thought that they would do their utmost to forward their own views, as well as his. "There is but one object in steeplechasing," said he to himself, "and of course everybody hereabouts will promote it. We'll call a committee when we get home."

There is also another view of steeplechasing not altogether in accordance with the previous one. The course selected is to be remarkably unlike a natural country. The fences are to be made very easy, and the weights are to vary, for starters, from 7 st. to 9 st. The variety of ground gone over is to be as much in keeping with this as possible; nothing vulgar or heavy, and ridge-and-furrow is to be especially avoided. Ox-fences and stiff timber are forbidden; but there is to be a moderate imitation of it, in low rails and unsound fences. There is to be a great competition for the friendship of the handicapper, and a relinquishment of all stakes and claims upon him in the event of the favoured animal pulling it off. This sport is not intended for gentlemen, though they occasionally indulge in it. It is intended for the professional bookmakers, and the possessors of weedy thoroughbreds which have been given up as useless at Newmarket Heath, unprofitable for the hunting field or the stud; but one of which, delicately

handled, is a positive fortune. Tom was ignorant on some of these points, and went to be enlightened. In the dusk of the evening, an hour before dinner, he reached the house of Mr. Jolly.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### HOW TO CHOOSE THE GROUND.

"PRAY walk in, Mr. Crackenthorpe, walk in, sir; straight on, if you please," said that worthy individual, as he escorted his visitor through a bright, clean, well-lighted saddler's shop, towards a comfortable back-parlour. "Very happy to see you, sir; pray be seated; there, keep your hat on, Mr. Crackenthorpe. Ah! you're not ashamed of your head, I see; when you get to my time of life, sir—eh! And what shall I offer you, sir?—one glass of good old sherry? a present from one of my customers, old Lord Poundington. Not so old either, egad! he won a steeplechase in Ireland only last week." And here Jolly brightened up; that is, as far as the most decent suit of black and a very grave methodical-looking face would permit. He might have been mistaken for an evangelical missionary, as far as appearances were concerned.

"Thank you, Jolly," said our friend; "I will take a glass of that sherry and a biscuit, for I shan't last till dinner, notwithstanding Sir Shakesby's breakfast."

"Ah! you have been there! Well, for my part, I don't care so much about it. Now, a race-horse, Mr. Crackenthorpe—there is something to look at in a thoroughbred 'un." And the methodical old humbug sighed.

"There's a good deal more to look at in some of those I saw to-day," said Mr. Jolly's guest, reverting to the unpromising lot which surrounded Sir Shakesby's lawn. "You've spoilt the hunter by your light-weight racing and steeple-chasing, Jolly. The thoroughbred ones are only fit to carry your boots, and the half-bred ones the whole of your wardrobe."

"Bless your heart, sir! what does it signify"—and Mr. Jolly's eyes twinkled at the rich harvests he had made, and which were still in prospect—"what does it signify, about this place, what

you ride? And you gents in the shires can always get what you want; leas'tways, by paying for it."

"Still, I don't see the advantage of having to give a hundred or two more for a thing, because you have made it so scarce. That's not what the Agricultural Society would call 'improving the breed of horses.' What we want is a good-bred horse, that can carry a man over a big country without breaking his neck."

"Well, now, what do you call a big country, Mr. Crackenthorpe?"

"Certainly not Liverpool, nor Leamington, nor any made courses whatever; but a good natural four miles of hunting country—say Market Harborough."

"Positively dangerous; indeed it is, sir. There was poor Martyr, the jockey's wife, in tears all day at the last races; and as to poor Mrs. Dickenson, as soon as ever she saw the brook she went into strong convulsions, and there she's been ever since—so they say, at least." Jolly sighed again, and helped himself and Tom Crackenthorpe to some more of the old brown sherry.

"Martyr and Dickenson are both funkies, and only fit for Liverpool, where you are more likely to be killed, but without thinking of it beforehand. Ask Mr. Bevill his opinion of the Harboro' course, and he'll tell you it's the fairest in England. But now, Jolly, tell me what you want with me about the Puntington race."

This was so evidently a step in the right direction, that Jolly immediately proceeded to replenish the glasses again; but Tom's modesty was as remarkable as his temperance, and he put in a feeble remonstrance. "Just one more glass; there's not a headache in a butt of it. What we want, you know, is to get the gentlemen of the neighbourhood to patronize us; and as you and Mr. Munster arn't living far off, and you has a taste for this sort of thing, we thought you might give us a turn; 'pon my word, sir, you ought; a great patron of the hunting-field, and a young man just entering life, as one may say, and a large fortune and a good deal of influence (Tom felt the warm-water trickling down his back), and such a capital judge of all them things (the sensations were growing pleasanter); upon my word, sir, you ought to give us a helpin' hand."

"But what the deuce can I do? What is it you want? I have a nomination."

"You must run a 'oss, you must, indeed, Mr. Crackenthorpe; and we'll make you a steward next year."

Tom felt again a satisfactory sensation, and took another glass of sherry at Jolly's request. In fact, this last hit about the stewardship was a clencher; and the worthy saddler, Clerk of

the Course, and Handicapper in Ordinary to the Pumpington Committee had played his last card but one before finishing the game.

Such a flattering suggestion to a young man was likely to make an impression. Foolish people imagine that a stewardship implies the necessity for doing or seeing things done, which may promote the objects of the meeting; and that the honour is not altogether an empty one. Indeed, men have been known rather to act upon the strength of the names which appear; and to quote my Lord —— and the Duke of —— and Sir ——, as guarantees of honest intentions and good management. But we who are behind the scenes know better than this; and sincerely honour old Cracks for his integrity, and laugh at him for his simplicity. Of course he thought that he should assist the county members and half a dozen sporting young noblemen in making such reforms as have never been contemplated since the death of the Liberator; and that the name of Crackenthorpe would descend to posterity with those of Lord George, the Admiral, and the gentleman in black, as the greatest benefactors the sporting world has yet seen. Having taken a moment or two to swallow his emotions, and get rid of some natural exultation at such a vision, he proceeded with the conversation:

“Run a horse! and what sort of a horse am I to run? I’ve nothing fit but a thoroughbred one, and he’s a hack.”

“Can he gallop, sir?”

“O yes!”

“I presume he’s not in the stud-book?”

“No; but he can’t jump, I should think. He’s quite unfit for a hunter. He can’t carry anything; or, I suppose, we could teach him to jump.”

“They’ll jump, sir; between ourselves, there’s nothing big enough here to upset a donkey; we’ve made it for the gallopers. So if you’ve anything that can stay four miles, and carry a fair weight——”

“And what should you call a fair weight?”

“Well, now, h-u-um! that depends so much upon circumstances,” said Jolly, balancing each word, and looking down intently upon his thumb-nail, which he had just bit, and then admired; “it depends so much upon circumstances. The top weight of course is nominal; the real beginning is at about 11 stone; and if you go for the stakes, you understand, why, of course, the weight ought to be there or thereabouts; if not, why, of course, it makes all the difference!”

“I don’t quite see that,” said Tom, somewhat puzzled. “What difference can it make whether I go for the stakes or not?”

"You see, sir, the stakes are worth six or seven hundred pounds, and if your horse is good enough to run for that sum—well, we can't throw him in; if you don't want the stakes, why, then, you see, sir, we could afford to give him a chance."

"What do you say to 8 st. 7 lbs.? I suppose a pretty good one couldn't loose?"

"Not very easily, unless there happens to be one equally good, put in at 7 st. 8 lbs." Tom began rather to see his way through the mist.

"But what becomes of the stakes? Doesn't the winner take them?"

"Not if he wins under such circumstances as that. Never thinks of asking for 'em; indeed he'd be quite ashamed to ask such a thing. And if he don't win, the next time he's handicapped his horse goes in for nothing. So, you see, anyhow it's a good thing."

"It's not a bad idea; but I never heard of it before."

"Oh! it's common enough, sir; everybody does it. There's Popham, of Timberville, who handicaps the Grand Patriarchal, lives entirely upon it. It's a good thousand a year to him. He's a clever fellow, is Popham. All his relations, excepting his aunt, keep race-horses: and the old lady has one of the best ponies in England."

"Do you mean to say that Popham pockets the stakes of the Grand Patriarchal at Timberville?" asked Tom, with a wonderful stare of astonishment.

"To be sure I do," replied Jolly, with an equally surprised countenance at having to discover so much; and McPhail of Nosebury, too. If they didn't do something for themselves, I don't see how they could get on at all."

"And what does the press say?" again inquired Tom, who had a mighty high opinion of the powers of the fourth estate, and imagined a sporting paper was very little behind the Thunderer in importance.

"Oh! the press is always at 'em; but, Lor'! as long as they sack the money, they don't care about the press. It's always blowing up somebody, and apologizing; and telling wonderful stories, first of Lord This and Lord That, and then of Popham and McPhail, just for the pleasure of contradicting itself the next day. I dare say, now, you've seen my name in print before now?" And Jolly put on a look of supernatural simplicity.

"Well, I certainly have; not always in very flattering terms."

"Yes! and I dare say you will again; but it don't hurt me. Besides, they won't say anything very bad of us; for we're pretty liberal, and always give them a turn when we can—at least, the

most violent of them. I know a gent as had such a case against Popham, and he tried to print it; but the sporting press was dead against him, to a man: and the honestest of 'em said, 'Oh! it's all right, Mr. Smith, but it's impossible to print that; for he does give us such breakfasts all the Timberville week: it's impossible, so you must alter it before it goes to press; indeed you must.'

"Then you want me to do as every one else does, I suppose?" and Tom rose and finished his glass.

"Yes, sir; and if you've got anything good, never mind about the heavy weights at Lushenham; send it here for our handicap: and mind you back it for a place, at all events."

"All right," said Tom, as he put on his hat and walked slowly out of the room, perfectly astonished by the coolness of the proposal. "All right; good morning, Jolly; it must be near dinner-time; that's a good-looking saddle." As Tom was leisurely descending the steps, he turned once more, and said, in a low tone of voice, to Mr. Jolly, who stood on the upper door-step, "And what ought one to back for the Timberville, between ourselves?"

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, I wouldn't touch it at present; it's meant for one of his own lot; but I don't think he's made up his mind yet. He does owe his brother Sam a turn, and I shouldn't wonder if he puts him into a good thing. Good day, sir;" and Mr. Jolly touched his hat civilly.

This conversation made a profound impression upon Tom Crackenthorpe, and much cooled his steeplechasing ardour. He was really a good, honest fellow, fond of the sport. He liked tumbling about himself, and even preferred to see others doing so. He firmly believed in fox-hunting, and everything provocative of it, from the correct breed of terriers to the highest-bred horse in Lord Stamford's stud; and he loved steeplechasing because he fancied he saw in it a mode for making and encouraging good horses and horsemen. Neither did he object to anything that partook of the nature of fun; and as long as the farmers were satisfied, and their wives and daughters assembled in sufficient numbers, and with a sufficiency of cherry-coloured ribbons, Tom was happy. The conclusion he arrived at, after considerable meditation on the subject, was, that Mr. Jolly was a great rascal, but no worse than Mr. Popham, and McPhail, and half a dozen more; and his final determination to have nothing to do with any of the lot. He was committed to a chase at Lushenham, for the good of the neighbourhood, and to repay the damage which had been done by riding over the crops and grass, and he intended to make it as honest and practically useful as he could. "We'll have a committee meeting as soon as I get back."



In the meantime, old Sparkes had felt so aggrieved by the public attack made on his reputation by Bobby Munster, that he found it absolutely necessary to write to that gentleman, as soon as he had mastered the information which reached him from his good-natured friends on every side. He was not long in concocting an epistle, remarkable for keeping in view a lawyer-like maxim, of never making any one so much of an enemy but that he might again become a friend. The letter was full of regrets: "he regretted the painful necessity," "the importunities of his friends," "the malice of his enemies." Above all, he felt satisfied that his friend Mr. Munster would be able to account for this "strange hallucination," and to give a denial to all that had been asserted on that occasion. The fact is, Sparkes still thought that Amelia had a chance with Tom Crackenthorpe, as Mr. Falconberg Smith had not yet proposed; so he withheld all threats of horsewhipping for the present, and held out nothing but the olive-branch.

Now Bob was a very clever fellow, and very willing to look over the insult he had offered to old Sparkes; indeed, it was more a matter of '47 claret and larking than anything else; but how to deny having said what five hundred people heard, or to aver that Sparkes meant Cutpurse or any one but Sparkes, was beyond Bob's ingenuity. He was sorely puzzled for at least a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time he read the lawyer's letter once more, and an inspiration almost divine fell upon him. "Hallucination," said Bob, talking to himself; "strange hallucination! by the piper! that's it—that's just what it was. Here goes—it will delight all the women, and all the parsons who believe in satanic influence, and pacify half a dozen lawyers at once. Here goes."

"Lushenham, February 14th, 186—.

"DEAR MR. SPARKES,—Your letter has supplied a link in a chain hitherto wanting. I could not ascertain, on my recovery of my senses, what nonsense I had been talking. If any little trifle slipped out injurious to the feelings of any person, more especially of one for whom I have the highest esteem, and whom I have always regarded as a friend, I cannot express my regret in language sufficiently strong. It has always been understood, not only by your excellent Vicar, but by many of your friends, that that mysterious power, under which I was spell-bound, is demoniacal. If anything were required to produce conviction on my mind of this fact, it would be found in the compulsory falsehoods which it seems I must have uttered under this malignant influence. What renders the case doubly painful is the fact that those falsehoods, like the Father of Lies himself, are said to have had an

unaccountable semblance of truth. In the hands of an honourable person, like yourself, this letter will doubtless be most satisfactory, and I can assure you that it will give me great pleasure that you should make any use of it you think best.

"Believe me, &c., &c.,

"ROBERT MUNSTER."

Having finished this explanatory epistle, Bob rang the bell, and called for one of Mr. Crackenthorpe's largest regalias, out of the box marked "Superfine best dos Amigos." "You'd better bring down the box, by the way."

The next day but one brought another billet from Sparkes, in which the old gentleman thus began:—

"MY DEAR MR. MUNSTER,—Many thanks for your reply, which, I need hardly add, was most satisfactory ;"

and which ended by a renewed proposal to have a day or two at Lushenham, and the kindest regards of Mrs. Sparkes and the young ladies, who quite missed the pleasure of seeing Mr. Munster at the evening parties, &c., &c., &c. Towards the close of which Bob slipped himself into a hat and coat, and suddenly remembered that he owed a visit to that worthy little man the Rev. Daniel Partington.

When Tom returned to Lushenham there was plenty to do. The first consideration was the steeplechase ; so he assembled a committee at once. The nominal stewards consisted of all the masters of hounds round about, that capital sportsman Mr. Bumby at the head of them. Then came a string of M.P.'s and Lord-Lieutenants, and of swells of every denomination ; and remarkably well they looked on paper. They all entered something, and some intended business : those who did not, regarded the payment of the forfeits in the light of a very remote contingency ; and even Tom himself saw one of two things—either that the winner would have to go without a considerable portion of the stakes, or that he would have to pay them. It's astonishing how liberal men are, after a cheerful day's sport, with a patent pencil in their hand, and the conditions of a handicap or a sweepstakes before them. The quantities of chances they speculate upon are marvellous : Death, India, Ireland, the Queen's Bench, or Matrimony. However, on paper, the Lushenham chase bid fair to be the best of the season. Top weight, 13 st. ; minimum weight, 10 st. 7 lbs. A sweepstakes of 10 sovereigns each, half forfeit, and 200 added, half of which came out of the pocket of Tom himself—Munster's 50*l.* might be considered as honorary only. He proposed, indeed, to head the subscription list, as a well-

known sporting friend of ours is supposed to have assisted to build churches in the colonies—by heading the donors with a very handsome sum, of which he pays nothing, but expects to receive a trifle for the liberality with which he acts decoy. That project was, however, abandoned, as half a loaf was considered better than no bread. To give nothing at all is not unhandsome; but a present of minus 25% was something new to the sporting world of Lushenham.

The working committee made up for the drones by the most active zeal. It consisted of Tom himself; Munster; a sporting young nobleman, Lord Cropperton, who lived a couple of miles off; Mr. Bumpas, a jovial yeoman of sixteen stone; and a very hard-riding young Sawbones, who had a practical knowledge of the brittleness of other people's members, and a theoretical belief in the infrangibility of his own. They were first-class men for their work. They had always a paper and pencil for the enlistment of stray steeplechasers. They were always on the look-out for something to run for themselves; and the doctor was already happy in the possession of a sort of Muderideroo, which nobody could ride but himself. In fact, his stud was at the present moment something like the learned serjeant's handwriting: of the three which he called his own, one he could ride, but his groom could not; another his groom could ride, and he could not; and the third, nobody alive, to get through a run, upon any terms whatever. They were also very active at their meetings; they had no end of foolscap paper, and cigars, and Burton beer, and the "Racing Calendar" and "Bell;" and they made several propositions and amendments; and, as those met with very little favour, they all set to talking at once. It generally ended by a proposal to finish the day at the château, which was invariably agreed to, when Tom presided over as good a dinner as it was possible to give them.

The saddle-room was occasionally the scene of these business-like meetings; and as upon the present occasion they could neither increase the number of nominations, nor make 500 sovereigns out of 375, nor do anything in the way of accelerating matters, seeing the races were not to be run till the end of the season, they proposed to go and look at the ground.

"Drinkwater, let's have what hacks you can. Here, one—two—three—oh! you'd rather walk?—four. Let's have the chestnut, and Acheron, and Flowerpot, and, let me see——"

"Not one on 'em!" said Mr. Drinkwater. "Bless you, they're all done up! they've been in fine exercise this three hours, except the hack, and he was out all day yesterday, and has to come again to-morrow." And the faithful guardian turned the key of the long stable and put it into his pocket.

"Oh! come, nonsense!" said Tom. "What are we to do? we want to go over the steeplechase ground."

"You'd better walk, sir; it's a good deal safer. As to the doctor there, there's soon to be a vacancy in his district, and he's sure to kill your horse, if he don't do for hisself."

Having oracularly delivered himself of this axiom, Billy put his hands into his pockets, and retired to his own quarters. The discomfited committee set out for their walk. They went up the hill above the village to a fine large grass-field of unmitigated ridge and furrow, which commanded a grand view of the vale below. They were not long in fixing upon a course which included all kinds of fences, of various sizes, but all fitted for the capacity of a hunter. They took, too, a bird's-eye view of the country; and amongst them managed to make the affair so complicated as completely to puzzle themselves. The line, as they marked it out, reminded one of nothing so much as the Regent's Park canal after an exhibition of the Skating Club; and the figure of 8 which it was presumed to represent was quite as much like the spread eagle as anything else. If the result was not at first sight what it ought to have been, we can excuse that in the manifest unanimity of the committee for one object. Their views of the "manner how" were widely different, but they agreed wonderfully as to the one great necessity—the powers of a hunter and the endurance of his rider.

"That's a big 'un," observed Farmer Bumpas, as they descended towards a stiff post and rails half-way down the hill-side, with a straggling ox-fence and a fairish ditch on the landing-side.

"Nothing, positively nothing," argued Sawbones; "going at the pace they'll go at it. Sure to get over: no chance of a fall there. What do you say, Squire?"

"Good big fence," replied Tom, to whose name this title had been prefixed by his intimates; "but I think a good hunter would do it."

"I'm sure he would," said the sporting doctor.

"Well, we can easily settle the question," said Lord Cropper-ton. "Perhaps Mr. Sawbones will ride over it before the day?"

"With pleasure, my lord; which horse shall it be?"

"Oh! whichever you like."

"Well, then, I'll have the big brown horse you rode the day before yesterday for second horse. I know he'll go over it or through it."

"Oh, I mean one of your own," said his lordship, mightily tickled with the notion that horses were not more valuable than doctors; "I can't stand horseflesh."

"Oh! come, my lord; if I stand man."

"No, no; it's impossible to have that brown horse over again if you killed him, and——"

Here Tom stopped the conversation by a remark about the brook. "Not wide enough," said he.

"Certainly not," said the doctor.

"Let's shovel it out to about sixteen feet," said Bumpas; "I'll lend you some hands; they haven't got much to do just now."

"And we'll put up some bushes in front of it to make them rise," added Tom Crackenthorpe, as a clencher.

"That's a sneezer," again said Tom, as they came to a rattling double; the further rail, however, not being so strong as it might have been, would give a chance of getting through, if not over, safely. There was a deep ditch between the rails, running water below, and some very prickly cut blackthorns strewed over it—a sort of open drain.

"Yes, that's a good fence," said the doctor; "not so strong as it might be."

"Bless you, doctor! strong enough for anything;" and, being on that side of it, Mr. Bumpas sat down on it, when, as if to prove his position, the rail broke in the middle, and let the fat farmer go flop into the blackthorns, whose ill effects were partly counteracted by the running water below.

"By Jove! that's lucky," said Sawbones. "You must send up Peggs to-morrow with a good thick rail and some long nails, or we shall have to change the line; and I'm afraid we shan't be able to get anything bigger round about this country."

"Come," said Cropperton, who really was a pretty good judge, and had his senses about him; "come, it's quite big enough for anything, and looks like a capital course, if one could but see it. Describe it to us, Cracks, that's a good fellow. It's as bad as the maze at Hampton Court."

"Look here. Start from this field, go straight up to that barn, and turn to the right up the big grass-field, with the big ox-fence at the top, into the ridge and furrow. Bear away to the left towards the windmill. At the windmill turn again to right, and over the bullfinches, by Jones's farm, down the hill into the bottom, over that little double——"

"Wait a moment," said Cropperton, utterly out of his bearings.

"Oh! don't you see? it's simple enough. You see the bullfinch at the top of the hill, and there are two more which you can't see. Then turn to the right again, and come down-hill to the big double post and rails—old Bumpas's rails, you know; then go straight on to the brook—we'll mark that out before the day—and after crossing the brook go straight up the hill, over the big rails and fence and ditch once more, and then round the

top of the hill, across the road, and you have a good run in of about a quarter of a mile."

"But why go over the oxer on the side of that hill twice? Once is enough."

"Because, if they don't fall the first time, they're sure to come to grief the second."

"Well, there's something in that, Tom, at all events. Where's Munster?"

"What! not here? He's spooning old Partington's daughter. She's got some money, I believe; at least, so he says: and I suppose he'll go and get married some day or other. He'll be at dinner. Give us a light. Well, I don't think we can do any more, so we may as well go back to luncheon. It's a splendid place for a chase. The next thing is to square the farmers."

When Crackenthorpe got home he found an invitation to dine at the Parsonage that day week; and as he hadn't seen the widow for some few days, he thought he might ascertain beforehand whether she was to be of the party, before spoiling his digestion by a clerical feed.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A LITTLE DINNER.

TOM CRACKENTHORPE and Munster had come home in time to dress for what the Rev. Daniel Partington called "a little dinner," towards the end of the hunting season. March dust was beginning to fly, the days were lengthening, the hounds were beginning to get a little fine and a little footsore, and there having been no rain nor frost lately, the studs were growing smaller and stiffer day after day. They were making their toilet by daylight, as the Vicar imagined a stretch to 6.30 was as much as could possibly be required for the formation of an appetite.

"Who's going to dine at the Parsonage, Tom?" said Mr. Munster to his friend; "any one besides ourselves?"

"Gladwish, I should think, and his daughter. They're intimate."

"Nobody else? don't happen to know whether the widow's going, do you?"

Fortunately for Tom, it's impossible to see a man's face through an inch and a half of wainscoting, so he answered in the intervals of a close application to his hairbrushes, "How the deuce should I know?"

"Thought you might have asked her out hunting to-day, that's all."

And so he had; and the affirmative reply had put an additional polish into Tom's general appearance, and had stuck a camellia into his buttonhole in particular, to mark the occasion. When Mr. Munster appeared on the landing-place he, too, was not to be despised; and he rather flattered himself, as he expressed it, "though no great beauty under ordinary circumstances, he knew how to put his war-paint on to the best advantage." He had yellow-ochred himself well to-night.

"Tom," said he, looking in at that gentleman's room, *en passant*, and leaning up against the door-sill, "I want your advice."

"It's perfectly at your service; and I hope you will find it as good as it is cheap."

"I've been thinking, Tom, that this is an infernally unprofitable life we are leading here;" and Bob looked like an image of virtue in polished boots.

"That admits of question, old fellow, though I don't want to argue the matter."

"Well, Tom, to tell you the truth, my old governor cuts up very rough sometimes, and I think of settling. He won't do anything for me."

"And you want to do for yourself. Well, Bob, settling always means one of two things—death or matrimony. Who's the young woman? and has she any money?"

"What do you think of old Partington's daughter—the eldest, I mean?"

"To tell you the truth, I never have thought of her at all: that's all a matter of taste; but I do think you might have done better in the way of a father-in-law."

Just then Tom's own amiable weakness came across his mind, and he thought he should have some difficulty in reconciling the world to Mrs. Bransby: so he stopped short, and added, "but that doesn't sound like money, Bob."

"Oh! you millionaires are so exacting; besides, I mean to work at law again. I shall sell the——"

Just then it occurred to him that the horses he proposed selling belonged to Mr. Curricke, the dealer and job-master.

"But you must have something to start with, Bob, if the governor is inexorable; so I should advise you decidedly not to settle. The moment you're married you'll have all your duns

down upon you. They know when to catch you: you'll find 'there's no rest but the grave for the pilgrim of love.'"

"But she's got 15,000*l.*; it's accumulating."

"So I should think by her turn-out on the grey. Well, I beg your pardon, Bob; I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but I haven't yet realized the situation. How do you know she has money?"

"I heard so before, so I went to Doctor's Commons. All from a godmother. Oh, my eye! what would I give for a couple!"

There's no doubt that with all his sentiment he would have preferred two godmothers to one bride. But the one he could get, and the other he could not.

"What does old Partington say, and the mother, the Gorgon?"

"Ah! that's the nuisance: of course, I can't go to him and say, 'My father's an ill-conditioned old beggar, not more than fifty-five, and likely to live as long as I am, so let me marry Matilda, and we'll live on her property.' Still, I must say, they don't seem much averse to business; and if the thing was once over, they'd come round fast enough; besides, she is her own master."

"I'll tell you what, Bob; if we stand here talking about the girl, I'm hanged if we shan't spoil the fish,—so let's be off. It only wants three minutes to the half hour."

With that they started.

There's no such latitude ever taken as in dinner-giving. There's your heavy, pompous, ponderous affair. Diamonds, stars and garters, blue ribands and turbans, huge épergnes, flowers, powdered footmen, our own man, iced puddings, and perspiration. The most gorgeous preparations, the grandest company, the very best dinner in the world, with everything in season, and out of season, and the very least possible means of enjoying it. And there's your wretched, half-starved, miserable counterfeit, pretended wealth, fashion, and society: a hired cook, hired plate, greasy soup, dirty dishes, badly cooked meat and watery vegetables, stupid people injudiciously placed, and not one single thing to be had till it's stone cold. There's your good heavy substantial repast, in which, if you have the stomach of an ostrich and the lungs of a stentor, you may satisfy your hunger, and take part in the conversation: more than you can possibly eat or drink, brown sherry, sound military port, and loaded claret are the external signs of a hearty welcome, and a deuce of a dyspepsia the next morning. And, lastly, we have to record a wishy-washy table *à la Russe*, in which one knows nothing of the substance of what one eats, and is so fearfully puzzled by the mongrel language of the *carte* that you are unable



the next morning to tell your physician, with any sort of certainty, whether you partook of fish, flesh, or fowl. I sigh, at a poor man's table, for the return of the honest soup, fish, roast and boiled, which I used to see in my young days, and enjoyed a first-class dinner the more from its rarity. Naturally the spread at the Parsonage had engaged the attention of the ladies for some days, old and young.

"You know, my dear, Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster are accustomed to nice little French dishes, and good things; so we must see what we can do in that way."

"Perhaps, ma', dear," rejoined Josephine, "they'll like a change."

Now the young lady's theory was certainly the correct one.

"Nonsense, Josephine!" said Miss Partington, "what an absurdity! as if Mr. Munster liked, or expected to see, roast beef and potatoes. We can easily manage the dinner with that book of Francatelli's; and we must have a *carte* for each person. Let's see, there will be eight of us, if Josephine don't dine."

Now, that's just the right number for a good dinner.

"Of course the *carte* must be in French, dear, and I'm afraid Sarah won't make much hand of that," said Josephine again.

I have always noticed that when people intend to be a little severe in their remarks their mode of address becomes singularly affectionate. In accordance with this principle, Matilda answered, "My darling Joey, I think I can manage that part of it."

"Of course, dear, there's my pocket dictionary in the parlour; and if there are mistakes, it does not signify much, for I suppose they neither of them understand anything about it."

This was a cruel backhander; and, worse than that, had all the sharpness of a *double-edged* sword, without that oily smoothness which is said to accompany language of this kind. A good deal of the cooking and the time was got over in this way. Mrs. Partington was too good a manager not to have played her part well, and by five minutes before 7 p.m., which was only twenty-five minutes behind time, the company sat down to what they called a nice little dinner.

The combined efforts of the cook and the three ladies had turned out something which was a mixture of the two last classes of entertainment; partaking of their nature, but belonging to neither. Flukes, the village publican, was in attendance as waiter. Cracks, alive to possible deficiencies, brought his own man, and there were two maid-servants, who, when they were not running up against one another, were listening with intense enjoyment to the *facetix* of Mr. Munster. They occasionally

retired to enjoy a little laugh, and when they were behind the door, and the guests had to help themselves, it is astonishing how much better they got on.

"Lor'! 'Liza, what a funny man he is, to be sure! I thought I should a busted; my, if that fool Flukes hasn't broke missus's best trifle-dish."

There was a little mistake at starting. When the cover was removed from the turbot, it presented the appearance of having died of the cholera. It rather startled the guests, to see a large black thing, as flat as a pancake, where the fish ought to have been. On inspection it proved only to have been placed wrong side upwards. One disadvantage had been avoided; there was no *épergne* of cut flowers to limit the range of vision or conversation, and it went on pretty generally and cheerfully throughout. It is but justice to say that Mrs. Greystoke looked more bewitching than ever, and was more than usually attentive to the invalid Captain Gladwish. That gentleman's daughter was, as usual, the picture of good humour, and Matilda had not only dressed her dinner, but her hair, in the height of the *mode française*. Crackenthorpe was astonished to find himself admiring Emily Gladwish so much; unluckily, however, the widow saw it too, and took an early opportunity of luring him back before the dessert appeared. The French *cartes* did not convey that information for which they were intended, and as Mr. Flukes handed the dishes from the sideboard after carving them, he was applied to more than once for the name of the suspicious-looking object which he was offering.

"What is this?" said Tom, *sotto voce*, looking at some barbarous production in a mottled gravy—"what is this?"

"Reely don't know, sir," replied Flukes, aloud: "Oh! yes, sir, I see—filly de buff Napoleon à la Tartarre;"

"You must try that, Mr. Crackenthorpe, it's 'à la Napolitane,'" said Miss Matilda.

And Tom helped himself.

"Not such a bad shot of your man," observed Tom, who affected not to recognise Flukes in his new position, "mixing up Napoleon and Tartar sauce together."

"Good run to-day, Munster?" said the host. "You must have been near here; I heard the dogs whilst I was burying a corpse. Cold work!"

"Which, the corpse or the hunting?" asked Munster.

"Becky seen haller chassore," said Mr. Flukes, again, in a louder tone than ever, the effects of a third of a bottle of gooseberry taken surreptitiously between the courses.

"What's that?" asked Captain Gladwish, this time in his innocence.

"They look like snipe," said Tom, to whom they came next, and who helped himself again.

"They *are* snipes," said Flukes in a confidential tone, "but we're ordered to call 'em 'Becky seems' to-day. They come from France, I believe, sir."

"Bumby goes on with the hounds, Munster?" said Captain Gladwish.

"Yes, but he loses his huntsman. It's a bad job, for we shall never have a better in this country; and he's a beautiful horseman. I hope we shall have your patronage to the steeplechases at the end of the season?"

"Certainly," said the Captain; while Mrs. Partington, thinking the conversation had taken too sporting a turn, hoped that Mr. Crackenthorpe and Mr. Munster were both archers. "Such a charming club, and the ladies' dresses so becoming—white tataran, with a green scarf, a white straw hat, and a green paroquet's feather."

"And what are these?" once more asked Munster, whether accidentally or to torment Mr. Flukes is not known, as he bent over a dish of most unmistakable tartlets. "What are these?" Consulting his *carte*, he read, "*Tartelettes aux—aux—*"

Mrs. Partington had already begun an answer to the question, when Flukes again volunteered an explanation.

"Well, sir, my wife made 'em, and I believe they're about twopence apiece."

"Champagne to Mr. Crackenthorpe," roared and spluttered the Rev. Daniel, by way of covering this misadventure; and Flukes, mindful of himself, immediately selected a virgin victim for immolation. The wire was untwisted, and the string was cut; when, with a loud report, pop went the cork into the face of the rev. gentleman himself, while the champagne itself followed without an interval's delay, right over the table, half of it into Mrs. Greystoke's lap, and the rest into the salad-bowl, which stood ready to receive it.

"Most extrornary—most extrornary! Bless my soul! what's the man about?" spluttered Partington, looking wrathfully up, and wiping his eye with his napkin. "What is the matter, man?"

"Can't think what's come to it. I kark'd 'un down myself, last summer, and it hadn't ought to be so up this cold weather." Whilst stuffing his thumb into the neck of the bottle, he kept running round the room to offer some of his own brew to the guests. I think he got the remainder of the bottle entirely to himself.

The fact is, that no man on small means ought to give a dinner at all. By all means let the hospitable soul take home some

friend, or any number of friends who enjoy his society; let him give him what he eats himself on a clean table-cloth. Let the dishes and plates be of the hottest; let the meat be of the tenderest; and let the waiting consist of as few hands as possible. A dumb waiter and help yourself, in a clergyman's family—indeed, anywhere but on state occasions—is far the pleasantest mode. Let the room look bright and cheerful, especially in winter, with a warm blazing fire and good lamps. Don't let your wife cover her head and uncover her arms; but let her wreath her face in smiles and good humour; and your daughters, if you are lucky enough to have any, endeavour to follow her example, "*simplices munditiis*." On no account attempt champagne and claret, unless you happen to have them good; and then let them be appropriate to the meats or dishes—not presented higglety-pigglety, as if your friends were only asked to be converted into a sort of family pig-tub. There is nothing so much marks the man of refinement or discernment as this fitness of things. Not writing a dissertation on dinner-giving, I need not say more; but a true philanthropist, knowing how much depends upon a good digestion, and the delicacy of its organism, I could not say less. Beware of sweets in a bad house, and the less you indulge in dessert anywhere the better. A poor man thinks my dictum a hard one. He wants society. Does he?—dinner society? Then let him cultivate his mind and his manners. There are plenty of good Samaritans in this world; but the return they look for is an agreeable, pleasant companion, able to fill up a corner well: not a horrible lion, who monopolizes the whole conversation, but a good listener as well as talker, and who knows what to say and when to say it. These persons are not common, but there are such; and they find no difficulty in enjoying society, without holding out a return of tasteless soup, flabby fish, badly cooked meats, and cheap wines for the sake of it. Let but a man be worth his salt, and he'll get the meat thrown in.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

## VISITORS.

TOM CRACKENTHORPE and Bob Munster survived the dinner; indeed, as their minds were occupied with other things, their stomachs seem to have been less affected than they might have been. (This shows great sympathy between the two.) Munster improved the occasion with Matilda, and Crackenthorpe, who was blest with a portion of that modesty which sits so gracefully on youth, made eyes at the widow. His soft nothings were breathed usually out hunting, where they could be treated as light badinage, or seriously imbibed, as the case might be.

It was clear enough to the neighbourhood that the château would change its name or its nature before another hunting season; and much speculation went on over the teaboards among the ladies—at the Sunday school, and in coming out of church, and on such like conventional occasions—as to which would remain in the village, Mr. and Mrs. Munster, or Mr. and Mrs. Crackenthorpe.

I think there was great excuse for this gossip. The ladies were both remarkable enough to form subjects of interest. The sermons of the Reverend the Vicar were dull in the extreme; Lushenham was not famous for bonnets; and the singing of the children in church had been discussed so often, that the subject was as dry as a speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. So the neighbours settled it in their own way, and the two gentlemen were as good as done for.

It was determined at the château to let off an ukase, and order up a few friends to enliven the place for a day or two.

The first who presented himself to their notice was Sparkes. Munster would rather have been excused; he hardly knew whether he had quite got over the results of his mesmeric experiments.

“Of course he has,” said Tom. “Didn’t he write you word that he was perfectly satisfied with your explanation?”

“Well, that’s right enough; but we have flirted with the girls, Tom, and——”

“*He!* Come, I like that, Munster. You have, not I. Besides, I don’t suppose it signifies to old Sparkes; he must be as much used to it as they, living at Pumpington. They’d all have been offended if you had not flirted with them. Besides, you can give him a mount—that’ll please the old boy.”

"All right. Anybody else? I hope he won't object to something playful, for I can't afford to lend him old Sheepshanks, Curricie's best mount."

"Must ask Cutpurse; you haven't paid that little bill, Bob, yet, for the shooting he so kindly let you."

"It's not due," said Bob, who thought very little about little bills till they were due.

"Then pay him next week—I'll help you."

"'Pon my soul, Tom, that's very liberal of you; but I'd rather not pay him, unless you're particularly anxious."

"Not I; but I've been keeping Acheron nice and fresh for him, and I thought the mount would go for something."

"Very well; then ask Cutpurse. It's a pity we don't know one more infernal rascal to keep him in countenance. Old Sparkes isn't half bad enough."

"Second post, sir," said Mr. Taplow, placing the letters on the table.

"Hallo; Bob, this is lucky—just in time; though whether he's quite up to the mark or not, I can't tell. I should hardly say he was far behind."

"What is it—a proposed visitor? I hope he brings his own steed."

"Not he. It's our old friend Stuart, of Heidelberg and Wiesbaden notoriety. I'll mount him on Nosegay. He won't do any harm to the horses, if he don't swindle somebody at hazard or *écarté*."

"Charming!" said Bob, who chuckled at the proposed meeting of Mr. Sparkes and the Professor, of whose identity Tom Crackenthorpe was still in delightful ignorance.

The consequence of these auspicious arrangements was, that in the course of the following week Messrs. Cutpurse and Sparkes appeared at the château. Sparkes had put up all his best hunting paraphernalia; his whitest cords, most correct tops, and a checked neckcloth, which was starched to the consistency of a middle-aged instrument of torture, but in which long practice had enabled Sparkes to swallow a sandwich or to take off his hat to a lady without winking. Indeed, he was one of the straight-necked ones, and no mistake, when really got up after this fashion. They added a knife and fork at their hospitable board for the Rev. Daniel Partington, and persuaded a sporting young squire and the hard-riding doctor to join them. The dinner was excellent, and the wines were appreciated, by the quantity they swallowed, and the good-humour that reigned throughout. Captain Stuart was announced late in the evening, had up the soup and fish, and a sweetbread, a fresh bottle of champagne, and was just in time to commence his first bottle of claret when they had got to their fourth.

Sparkes saw several Captain Stuarts, but was beyond distinguishing any one of them; and when they had had coffee and one of Tom's best regalias, the old gentleman was just enabled to count sixteen people, though he was quite sober enough to recollect that they had sat down only eight. The parson to do him justice, supported the credit of the cloth by retiring in good time, and leaving the rest of the party to settle their morning's prospects to their own satisfaction.

Cutpurse and Son, of Pluckham Court, Holborn, were money-lending solicitors, of the Jewish persuasion. There is a vulgar prejudice against that highly intelligent race. We confess to sharing it. Cutpurse was quite unmistakably a Caucasian. There was the fine development of feature, so remarkably indicative of the race; and had he lived in the days of Richard the First, his teeth would have been drawn for the very pleasure of extraction. They looked like biting, every one of them. Beyond the speculative shooting we have before mentioned, he could scarcely be called a sportsman; and the first impression produced by his appearance was that he was lost without an alias and two hats. He felt exceedingly flattered by the invitation to Lushenham, and he was not at all cured of his infatuation until he had dropped nine pounds fifteen shillings at blind hookey to the superior luck of Captain Stuart. This evening he was joyous in jewellery, velvet, patent leather, and black beard, and retired to bed under the impression that such was the ordinary life of the aristocracy of England.

"Good night, Mr. Cutpurse. There's a nice quiet animal for you to-morrow. Breakfast at nine. We ride our hunters on; it's only five miles."

"Good country?" said Sparkes.

"Best in England—stiffish—all posts and rails, excepting the river,"

"River!" said the Jew. "Is there a toll on the bridge?"

"There's no bridge—we jump it."

Cutpurse stared uneasily.

"What's my horse to-morrow, my dear Crackenthorpe?" said Sparkes; "you know I'm not so young as I was."

"Pretty good, though, still. Munster, what have you got for Mr. Sparkes?"

"Nice quiet little horse; kicks a little at starting, but charming to sit upon when he gets warm."

Sparkes thought of this, and then dreamt of it.

"What's your weight, Mr. Cutpurse?" said Munster, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Well, I don't know; I weigh different at different times."

"How many shekels?—pounds, I mean," said Bobby.

"Ah, ah! Good, good! No pounds, my good friend, Mr. Munster; you have the pounds."

"The scales, Tom; Mr. Cutpurse in the scales."

And they adjourned to the scales.

"Bless my soul, what a lot of money he must have in his pocket! We can't weigh you without you take it all out. Ah! that makes a difference. There—is that all? Well, I think Acheron will carry him. He's the best horse in the country, only you musn't hold at his fences; just let him go where he likes, and Sunday itself wouldn't stop him—you'd be out of one week into another without knowing it. Put him down, Tom, 9 st. 5 lbs., without his money; he's nearly 10 lbs. lighter than when he came here."

"And Stuart has gained a pound or two. I'm going to bed, unless Mr. Cutpurse would like another cigar. Good night."

And Tom Crackenthorpe retired.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

A LITTLE headache is the natural consequence of a good deal of claret, sherry, and champagne, however excellent they may be of their kind; and if they are assisted by a gigantic regalia, and a few unsuccessful rounds of blind hookey, it's astonishing how unmistakable it becomes. All things considered, old Sparkes turned up at breakfast time wonderfully well. He carried his head very steadily between the starched folds of his neckcloth, and didn't seem to care much about anything but his tea. He made, however, a feint of attack upon an admirable ham; and certainly, if a man can eat anything under the melancholy circumstances of the case, it is ham. Yorkshire lean with Westphalia fat, I am told, is the correct thing. As he proceeded he got better, and by the time he had admitted that that "one glass of cognac" after the *pâté* was too much for him, he might be said to be convalescent.

"Now, Stuart, what will you have—tea or coffee?"

"Neither, thank you; never touch either until after dinner,"



replied the sinister looking Captain, who was just as cool and comfortable as if he hadn't been sitting up and playing; indeed, the fact of winning instead of losing may make a difference to some men. Probably the little Jew lawyer, who hadn't spoken a word since he came into the room, was feeling the effect of his loss of weight. He looked unutterably wretched, and, as if to torture him more horribly, Mr. Taplow presented hot plate after hot plate, and muffins and eggs as accidental makeweights, until the poor little Cutpurse was fain to ask when the tea would be ready.

"Tea? What haven't you had any? Taplow, some fresh-made tea to Mr. Cutpurse. I'm afraid these fellows have emptied the pot here; but it won't take ten minutes, and there's lots of time." (Here Cracks, whose head was as strong as Guy Earl of Warwick's helmet, set to work on a kidney.) "But you're going to dress after breakfast, I suppose?"

"To tell you the truth," began Mr. Cutpurse, "I really didn't——"

"Never mind—gad! we'll manage: we'll find something for him: breeches—I believe you. I fancy Munster must have bought up a slop-shop: I never saw such a collection in my life."

"Now," said Bob, in a cheery tone of voice: come along, Cutpurse—I'll rig you out. What colour?" And the *toilette* began.

"There, now, there's a pair of breeches! I bought those in Bow Street nine years ago, to act Tony Lumpkin in, at my dame's. They're what Nathan called a first-class article; but there's no believing a Jew, you know. What! too small? Nonsense! you've got 'em on hind-side before! No, by Jove, you're right! I thought old clothes would have fitted you to a turn. I say, Cracks——"

Cracks, being the host however, didn't respond; so Stuart went up to assist with his advice.

"I say, Stuart, have you anything that would fit Mr. Cutpurse down here?"

During this time Mr. Cutpurse was secretly praying that nothing might fit him, and determining, if luck befriended him, to retire again to bed as soon as the sportsmen were gone on their expedition.

"I can lend him a pair of spurs," said the Captain, being about the last thing that the Jew lawyer was likely to want. "But leathers," added he, "by Jove, that's a difficulty; No, it's not—I see. Look here, Munster, Mr. Cutpurse has some drawers: splendid fit, and nothing to do but to sew the buttons on in the right place. Come here—you can hardly tell them from leathers now at a distance."

And whilst Cutpurse was shivering with cold, having not yet

substituted anything for his Tony Lumpkin suit, Munster and his friend the Captain took stock of him at a distance, and made these remarks, much as though he were a dummy, or a prize ox at an Islington cattle-show:—

“He must have four buttons on there, just below the knee; and I suppose he’ll want four more for his braces; then a pair of sham tops to his own Wellingtons (lucky he wears Wellingtons). Green—are they?” What the Wellingtons? We’ll black them all over; ‘pon my soul, it’s a first-rate idea.”

“But it will be so dreadfully cold?” Mr. Cutpurse ventured to suggest, in the tone of a man not wishing to push his opinion, but offering rather a suggestion to be taken into consideration.

“Billy! Billy Drinkwater!” shouted Mr. Munster out of the window, which he threw open, admitting a refresher from the N.E. upon the half-dressed Jew. “Cold? oh! no, certainly not, in exercise.”

And here Billy entered the room, and they continued in a livelier strain to discuss the matter, as if they now formed a quorum. Cutpurse still sat at the corner of his bed, and the grate, empty of all but last night’s ashes, did not add to the present warmth of the room.

“No, no! the gentleman won’t be cold; ‘cos the oss ‘ll keep ‘un warm—leastways he do me; and in course my missus can sew on the buttons; but there ain’t over much time, and, as we’re a trifle busy, I’ll lend the gentleman a pair of minc—the very best in England—fit him to a turn; we’re jist of a size and not very unlike:” and Billy looked at his broad ugly mug in the looking-glass, and leered like a satyr.

“Come with me, Mr. Munster; I’ll give you the small clothes. They’re the thickest, and the hardest, and the roughest in all England, something between a deal board and a Witney blanket, and if he rides Acheron for a few hours in them, I’m blest if I think he’ll ever sit down again in his life. I think he’s the gent as let you and master the shooting.”

Under these auspices the toilet was not long in completing. When Mr. Cutpurse appeared under the combined efforts of Billy Drinkwater, Captain Stuart, and Robert Munster, he was a very extraordinary mixture, and might have been mistaken for a loosened Bedlamite, with a monomania for hunting. On his head he wore a white billycock, with a small grouse-feather on one side, which had remained since the twelfth of last August, the trophy of Crackenthorpe’s first shot. His waistcoat was his own, and decorated with his usual amount of mosaic work, without which no Israelite considers himself quite a gentleman. His coat, long in the arms and back, and honoured by a hundred stains

and patches, must have been on the same service as Tony Lumpkin's breeches. The small-clothes were such as your true stableman delights in—large and baggy to a degree, until they descend to the small of the knee, to make that part till smaller. His boots, ignorant of tops, were blacked to meet the breeches and his necessities: no man could have mistaken them for anything but what they were. His appearance in front of the château was a signal for public approbation, to which he was enabled to respond only by a miserable and a sickly smile. They had got him up only to get him down.

The horses were already at the door.

"Don't you think the gent had better get up in the field at the back of the yard?" asked Drinkwater, sidling up to his master.

"Who do you mean by the gent?" said Mr. Crackenthorpe.

"Why, the little gent in them curious breeches and boots," said Billy.

"No, I don't; why shouldn't he get up here?"

"'Cos it's so precious hard on these stones."

There was just one drop of the milk of human kindness left in Billy.

"Yes; very well; but we must all go there. It won't do to send him there alone."

So the party drew off to the stables for a minute, lit their cigars, and inspected the rest of the stud; having done so, the horses were supposed to be in a place perfectly safe to mount, whatever might happen.

Horses are very often fresh at starting, as gentlemen know. Acheron was remarkable for his playful disposition; yet he had his mild days. Not so the horse on which Mr. Sparkes had just placed his left hand, preparatory to putting himself into the saddle. He had one trick: he would put his head down, if you allowed him to do so, and give two sharp and decisive kicks; if these were unsuccessful, he gave up for the day.

Sparkes, of course, prided himself on his horsemanship and his knowledge of hunting, and everything connected with it. Cutpurse was a snob, and a Londoner; and how any man in that costume could pretend to ride anything Sparkes did not know. How should he? He therefore took his seat on Mr. Currie's other horse, with a charming and rather dignified *sang froid*. He was scarcely in the saddle, however, nobody looking at him to admire the freshness of his complexion and the coldness of his demeanour, when down went his horse's head and up went his heels, with a quickness and an elevation which produced immediate results. So quickly was Sparkes on the flat of his back, that nobody saw it done. Everybody saw him there; but when

Crackenthorpe arrived to the rescue, he asked the only question which could have been asked :

"How the deuce did that happen?"

"Happen? egad, sir, I don't know what you call 'happen'; but if it 'happens' often, I should say it was something more than a matter of chance."

However, as they all offered to change horses, and nothing further of this playful nature appeared, Sparkes was mollified.

The malicious pleasure with which Munster watched Cutpurse on Acheron was impressive, but this was one of Acheron's quiet days, and notwithstanding the temptation held out to the horse by that gentleman's peculiarity of seat, he walked out of the field-gate, at the back of the stable-yard, like a lamb.

"Why, Billy, what's up with Acheron? he hasn't put his back up," said Munster, hanging back.

"Well, no, he hasn't; p'raps he don't know what to make of the gent, or p'raps he's seen the big breeches. He ain't nowadays so playful with me as he used to be; but he's worse after a bit, sometimes. When he do find it out he'll make up for lost time, I shouldn't wonder."

And with that Billy shut the gate and touched his hat; for though a very rough customer, he was scrupulously civil when not affronted.

As they jogged on to cover, Sparkes finding himself not hurt, and having taken advantage of a stable-brush to put himself to rights, and Acheron showing no symptoms of changing his present course, things assumed a cheerful appearance. The balmy air had a becoming effect upon Mr. Cutpurse. He looked less green every minute, unless that was to be attributed to the contrast with the surrounding country. He certainly gained confidence fast. He ventured, indeed, to touch Acheron very gingerly over the neck with a hunting-crop he had borrowed; but as it produced nothing more than a lurch with one hind leg, and a suspicious falling back of the ears, he determined upon trying it on no more.

Crackenthorpe was the only one with any weight upon his mind. "Sorry old Sparkes was kicked off," said he to himself, "though he has cheated me most confoundedly. It's not the right thing to ask a man to your house, and then have him on his back at your own door; might have hurt him too, poor old buffer. However, he's pretty happy again now, and the horse will carry him. As to Cutpurse, hanged if I know what's going to happen to him. Got no wife, I suppose; don't look a likely chap for any woman to have fallen in love with; but then they do marry sometimes without falling in love."

At that moment he caught sight of the widow Greystoke,

and his ruminations took too grave a turn for transcription. The rest of the party seemed to be enjoying themselves exceedingly.

By the time they reached the meet, the hounds were already gone on. And I always find, the nearer a man is to the meet, the more certain he is to be behind time.

Mr. Cutpurse's appearance excited much attention, but it was of a kind more demonstrative than flattering; in fact, Tom cursed his ill-luck in not remembering that a man is known by his friends. He was certainly not proud of his acquaintance.

As the hounds were thrown into cover, he saw Mr. Drinkwater, who had taken advantage of a hack in the stable, to walk up to the cover side.

"What will become of Mr. Cutpurse, Drinkwater? the horse seems quiet enough."

"Aye! he won't kick to-day; he'll only run with the beggar."

"Then keep him in sight, if you can; I don't want him to be killed."

"Nor the 'oss, either, I should think. He's a deal the most value of the two."

Tom then paid his compliments to Mrs. Greystoke; the rest of his party were happily more intent upon their own affairs than on his, and did not trouble him with their company. Munster started at once in pursuit of a grey cob and a habit he saw lower down the cover. Sparkes had found a pal in the hard-riding Doctor; Stuart was only desirous of a good start, and stuck close to the huntsman; and Cutpurse soothed Acheron, and followed at an humble distance the bold majority. At that moment a fox was hallooed away.

This is a moment in a man's life, when, if ever number one may be treated as the trump card in the pack, there is an excuse for some selfishness. What with opening the wicket-gate at the cover, which only lets one man through at a time, and then requires considerable energy on the part of the successor to keep it from closing again; what with the three only practicable places out of cover to accommodate a hundred or two ardent spirits, and one of those blocked up by a thrusting schoolboy and his pony come to grief; what with your own want of decision, and the remarkable possession of that quality of those behind who are shouting along the line, "Now, then, sir! pray get on; who is that in the front blocking up the way?"—what with these and a few other common miseries of getting, or rather of not getting away close to hounds, it is nothing extraordinary that Crackenthorpe took care of himself and Mrs. Greystoke; Bob Munster of Miss Partington, whose cousin, the Bashi-Bazouk, was off on his own hook; Captain Stuart and old Sparkes severally of them-

selves; and that Mr. Cutpurse on Acheron was left to look out for the practicable places, and on no account to meddle with his horse's head. Whether he did so or not is the question; he says he did not, the results tend to prove the reverse.

Checks, thank goodness, are known in every country, notwithstanding the alarming intelligence communicated weekly to the "Field" and "Bell's Life," of a ceaseless pursuit of one fox for an hour and forty minutes over some country or other; and consequently, on this auspicious day, Bumby had a check within ten minutes or a quarter of an hour of finding his fox.

Most of his field had ridden with something less of severity than Bumby himself, and in tolerable security; gates had done their duty, and none but the truly blood-thirsty had come to grief in that fifteen minutes. The women and the ponies were all there. At the moment that Scrummager was hitting off the scent with the sagacity for which that five-year old hunter is remarkable, disdainful of the distant hallo, or of the more personal attempt to carry him off the line, a small hazel copse on the right of the field, and by no means in the traversed line of the hunted fox, opened with a frightful crash. Bump, thump, went a head or a boot; c-r-a-s-h, with a long crackling noise, went the trees on either side; and, with his mouth bleeding, and his head and tail well out, Acheron appeared. That he had got rather the better of his rider was evident from that gentleman's appearance. He had been pulled out of his saddle, and was sitting behind it, holding on by the reins and the pommel. He had one whole boot, and about two-thirds of the other. His cap was fortunately well down upon his head. His coat had lost one skirt; and there was a general appearance of loose jewellery about his neck and breast, which belonged rather to a man with difficulty escaping from the hands of a garotter. The case was simple enough.

The first fence had shaken Cutpurse out of his seat on alighting, and as he got back into the saddle after some lengthened operation near the horns, he managed to put his spurs into the horse's shoulders. He was quick at taking a hint, and without any regard to the hounds or the field he made off at a good round pace: most people would have called it running away. He made for a hazel copse, undefended luckily by its usual ditch and fence, and rushed unresistedly through it. As he emerged, the sight of the field was to Cutpurse as the advent of the good Samaritan; and he having ceased from sheer inability to pull, Acheron had ceased to resist, and galloped straight into the middle of the people, who made way on every side. Mr. Cutpurse, having crawled back into the saddle, was about to answer the inquiries of his friends, and the derision of the spectators, by abandoning the pleasures of the chase, and endeavouring to secure only a

quiet return to Lushenham, when that noisy brute Scrummager gave notice of his success; the halloo on the hills was repeated, the horn sounded, the horses began to trot, from that trot they broke to a gallop, and before our friend Crackenthorpe could offer his condolences, and just as he was on the point of suggesting an exchange of horses, Acheron once more started with his damaged freight.

"He's off again by Jove! What a pluck'd one it is, to be sure!"

Cracks looked up, Munster looked up; and to the dismay of the first and the delight of the second, they saw him disappearing over the next hill towards a very practical bullfinch in the opposite direction to the hounds.

"I hope he won't be killed," said Cracks.

"I hope not either," said Stuart; "he hasn't paid me that nine pounds fifteen yet, and I don't suppose I shall find it in his will."

Meanwhile the hounds set to running, as they will run sometimes over a fine scenting country; men set to riding, as they very seldom will ride in any country but Mr. Bumby's; and by the time they had broken up their fox, every man, excepting those concerned for the horse, the clothes, or the money of the Jew lawyer, had forgotten his existence.

No sooner did Billy Drinkwater see him begin to go than he began to consider whether his master's property might not be his particular business. Having made up his mind that it was, with a melancholy sigh he turned from the sport, and cantered up the hill towards the thick bullfinch, which he honestly hoped might bring the two to grief. He found nothing in it but a piece of his own breeches, which had been left there. It was a considerable way round by the gate, and Mr. Drinkwater therefore essayed the fence at a broken place. The best of us fall sometimes; and by the time Mr. D. had turned a summersault or two, and ascertained that the hack was all right as well as himself, he might as well have looked for a needle in a bottle of hay as Acheron or his rider.

That gentleman's course was erratic; but, with some sort of reason in his madness, he kept the hounds somewhere to his left hand for a length of time. Occasionally Cutpurse, unable to stop him, would still turn him, and in this form or fashion he made the circuit of several large fields, eventually making his exit through, rather than over the fence, and continuing the same amusement in the next pasture. It is but justice to his rider to state that he never fell off—he was here, there, and everywhere; but with a bold defiance of fate, he was still in the saddle. Perfectly exhausted, it is true, but with his arms wrapped convulsively round

Acheron's neck, he had the satisfaction of negotiating several ugly fences, to say nothing of being carried bodily through a piece of timber, which opened involuntarily to receive them. In a given time the horse was quite as much beat as the rider; and coming down to the bottom of a grass field, he finished his career by going straight at the Washingborough brook. Of course, Cutpurse let go his hold at the sight of the water, and tumbled ignominiously into the mud, from which he was retrieved by a couple of grinning yokels, at work with a team in the next field; whilst Acheron lay without sense or motion, luckily high and dry, on the bank, from which recumbent position he made no attempt to rise.

"My beye, Bill, I do think he be a dead 'un!" This referred to Acheron.

"No, he bean't dead; more's the pity!"

So thought Cutpurse, but he didn't say so — he felt perfectly sure, however, that he was out of any more riding.

"He's a broken-back'd 'un, I lay a trifle."

"Broken back? What had I better do?" said Cutpurse imploringly.

"Can't do nothin' but shoot 'un: put 'un out of his misery, poor thing! Such a fine 'oss too; and such a jumper! I suppose you be throw'd out; the 'ounds is gone the other side o' the hill, this ten minutes or more."

By this time one or two more came from the farm, and a couple of women joined in the chorus — "Poor thing! well, to be sure! lor, Giles, what is to be done?"

"Ha' you got a gun? 'cos he can't lie here groanin' till master comes home."

"To be sure; but who's to shoot 'un?"

"Oh! I dessay the gent 'ud like to shoot 'un hisself."

This bloody-minded sentiment was nearer the truth than Bumpkin imagined. Giles just then appeared at the gate, having acted upon the suggestion and gone for his master's gun. Acheron continued to groan.

It was a fortunate circumstance for Tom Crackenthorpe that Mr. Cutpurse was no great hand at the knacker's art. First he had to make up his mind; then to find the place to bore a hole; then he presented at half-cock; and then, when he did pull in real earnest, the gun missed fire. At that moment there came through the field-gate the second whip with a couple of puppies, one of which had been kicked, and which he was leading. Of course he came to see what was going on; whilst Mr. Cutpurse proceeded to open the nipple with a pin, urged to the work of destruction by the lamentations of the women — "Poor thing, poor thing! put 'un out of his misery!"



"Hollo! now, then, what are ye at wi' the horse?—ain't a goin' to shoot him? What 's he done?—only given ye a black eye?"

And here Jack handed over the puppies and his horse to Giles, and began to examine the dying quadruped.

"He's broke his back," said Mr. Cutpurse dolefully, thinking what might be the expense of such a brute, and how much he could save by the carcass.

"Broke his back? why, blow'd if it ain't that runaway devil o' Mr. Crackenthorpe's! Good horse, though. Broke his back, has he? and you was a goin' to shoot him? Why, he's only pumped. Come up 'oss!—come up!" And giving him a sharpish flick with the point of his whip, Acheron gave a final grunt, and got on to his legs with a prolonged shake. "It's rayther lucky for you, young man, as that ere gun don't go off very kindly, or you'd a committed manslaughter, I should say. I don't know who you be, but darn'd if you ain't a rum 'un, you know, and no mistake! Here, give us hold o' those couples, young fellar. Broke his back? I'm blowed if he won't break your neck, now, afore you get home, if you come any of them games any more. He's all alive again." And at that eventful moment Mr. Drinkwater appeared on the other side of the brook, coming down to the scene of the catastrophe.

Acheron was ordered up to the farm-yard, where he was dressed over a bit, and just a little warm gruel and a pint of ale administered. Billy Drinkwater crossed by a ford in the neighbourhood, and appeared for the consolation of Mr. Cutpurse.

"Wo-ay, wo-ay, little man; Lor'! he's as fresh as ever—he'll run agen directly. Now, sir, you'd better get up, and be off; just give him a gentle jog to keep him from chilling." And Billy held the stirrup ready for the Jew to get up again. "Nose bleeds, does it? I know a key's a werry good thing, so is cobwebs; but whether you put 'em down your back, or up your nose, I can't say; key up your nose, I suppose, and turn it; cobwebs down your back, in course, catches the fleas."

During this suggestive advice, the terrible prophecy of Jack, the second whip, came to mind — "Break your neck, now, afore you get home, if you come any of them games any more." As to getting on Acheron again, it appeared an act of deliberate suicide without extenuating circumstances.

"I'll lead him a bit," said Cutpurse, which seemed like a compromise between walking and riding.

"That's no use, sir; the horse'll catch cold. There, give him to me, and I'll jog him home by the side of mine. I dessay Joskins will lend you something to ride to Lushenham when he comes back—won't he, missus?"

Saying which, with much coolness, Mr. Drinkwater just threw the reins over the horse's neck, and, jumping on to his own pony, trotted deliberately off, leaving his master's friend staring after him.

"Not a going to trust him with any more of our valuable animals, not if I knows it. He'll be blowing their brains out if they begin dancing a bit, and most on 'em do betimes."

The party at the château was about dressing for dinner, when who should appear but the Jew lawyer! He had neither bag nor baggage, and no horse; but he had a very handsome cotton umbrella, evidently the property of Mr. Joskins. He would willingly have gone quietly up to his room, with the modesty for which almost everybody in a similar position is remarkable. He was, however, hailed, as he entered, with vociferous acclamation.

"Where's Joskins's hack? Had another downer? By Jove how you must have ridden! How did you get home—rail or post?—you don't mean to say you walked? Why, Drinkwater told you to borrow old Joskins's pony. What have you done with your boot? How far is it from here? Why, you must have walked nine miles at least. I wish I could walk like that, don't you, Cracks?—we could take that shooting then again this year."

At last the unhappy money-lender was allowed to dress himself; and when he got down it was difficult to say whether he was not a more miserable object than before, so tired and wobegone was his appearance.

Dinner, however, restored him. He had just begun to feel himself. Champagne and the crackling fire had done wonders; and the necessity for eating had spared him quite such a torrent of questions as he must have submitted to. He had failed in his attack upon the farmer's generosity, who regarded him as an impostor; and the two females and Giles and Bumpkin had sucked him dry of his small change. He had a black eye, a pain in the small of the back, and a blister on his heel; but the dinner was so good, he had just forgotten his misery.

"Please, sir, could Mr. Drinkwater speak to you for a minute?"

"Tell him to come to the door. What is it, Drinkwater?"

"The horse is uncommon bad, sir."

"Which?"

"Acheron—the one as Mr.—that gent with the—the—black heye rode; he'll be a stiff 'un before to-morrow. I've sent for Doscham."

And Billy retired.

"That's a bad business; can't be helped. Have some champagne, Cutpurse? dry or——"

"Moist, thank you," said Cutpurse, so utterly dumbfounded by this pleasant intelligence that he swallowed bumper after bumper of all sorts of wines, and was eventually taken to his room fast asleep with drink and fatigue between Mr. Taplow and a footman.

"Half-past eleven," said Mr. Taplow, the next morning, drawing up a blind, and admitting a blinding sunshine.

"Bless me! you don't say so? and where are the gentlemen?"

"All gone hunting, except Mr. Sparkes; he's gone to Pumpington."

"And the horse—the one that was ill last night?"

"Oh! he's been dead some hours, sir."

As if it was a weekly occurrence!



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE PLEASURES OF MEMORY.

BEFORE Cutpurse proceeded to dress himself he took a judicial view of his position—in the language of his professional brethren he began to "sum up." The total was not a pleasant figure to look at. According to a fair estimate of his performance he had not reaped much by his visit to his client Mr. Munster. There was the expense of the journey both ways, ready money—there was a matter of nine pounds and more for blind hookey to Captain Stuart, that was not paid yet, and Cutpurse and Co. were accustomed to count interest per day, so that fact was a little gain. There were the usual fees to grooms, servants, &c., which he determined should be unusually small. There was a pair of boots—good ones, too, originally—of patent leather, green tops, utterly ruined, and one almost entirely missing; breeches—oh, no! the rest of the clothes belonged to other people. Then, on the debit side might be placed a frightful headache, squeamishness, and utter prostration; loss of two days' time, and no business done with his clients. Clearly no present want of money with Mr. Munster or his good friends. Was that all? Well, not quite; there was that little item of the horse. And here the Jew lawyer crawled out of bed. "All gone out hunting! Father Abraham! that's lucky: I must have business, too. I can't stand another

night of it: and even that's better than the day." Here he made a desperate attempt to stand upright. I only hope none of my readers have felt that indescribable all-overishness resulting from too much drink, a solitary ride on a hot horse, accompanied by three or four falls, and a natural liability to lumbago. The pain almost overcame his resolution; and had he not caught sight of Billy Drinkwater in the stable-yard at that moment, he must have crept back into the sheets again. The sight of the redoubtable Billy nerved him to the task, and he proceeded to dress himself. Having recovered himself a little from the first shock, he began to think over the value of the dead horse. "Say thirty pounds," cogitated Mr. Cutpurse, "or even forty; he can't be worth more than that; even there's the carcass—say two pounds—to the good. Then there's Munster's bill due next month, and the shooting he took as part payment. Well, I must take off that; I'd better have stopped at home. Perhaps their friend the Captain may want a loan some day"—and by the time he got thus far he finished his toilet, and crept stealthily and painfully down stairs.

"Tea, sir—coffee, sir?" said Crackenthorpe's own man, repairing the *débris* of the breakfast-table. "Rolls, sir—little boar's head? yes, sir; not so much fat, sir?"

"No, no!—not boar's head," said the Jew, who expected the roof to fall in upon him already for his wickedness. "No—no boar's head!" thinking of his own.

"Ham—fried ham in ten minutes," was Mr. Taplow's next offer.

"No—nothing to eat; just a cup of tea: and—and—I say, Taplow, could you get my carpet-bag packed up directly, and tell me when the next train goes to town."

"Town? yes, sir, certainly," replied Taplow, with an expression of some surprise. "There's a train at one o'clock, sir; perhaps I'd better do your things at once;" and, leaving him abruptly to finish his breakfast, the ready valet and butler proceeded to pack the Jew lawyer's carpet-bag. He packed it to some purpose; and when the unlucky owner got to town, he found his own dress suit left behind, and the torn coat, hat, boots, and breeches of Mr. Drinkwater and his master's in the mouth of his sack.

The death of Acheron was an awful consideration, and no amount of the very best "gunpowder" could drown the reflections which naturally arose. Being somewhat ignorant of business of this kind, and of the expectations formed by gentlemen on the subject of horse-flesh, Mr. Cutpurse was down upon his luck. It was a painful fact that he was not likely to get free of his present difficulty under fifty pounds, supposing he forgot to

pay Captain Stuart; and that ate up a moderate share of his interest upon Munster's loan. However, having satisfied his appetite, he began to speculate on his best method of getting to the station. The best method had reference to the mode of progression least noticeable; inasmuch as a solemn principle of money-saving, where there was none to be made, taught him that his first duty was bilking the servants, as far as practicable. If he could only collar his carpet-bag, and be off, it was hard if he didn't meet with a chance lift for a shilling or two on the road; or perhaps the village fly might be got out, and the ostler despatched for his bag at the cost of sixpence. He started to cross the stable-yard in furtherance of his design.

Unfortunately for him, at that moment Mr. William Drinkwater was enjoying his morning pipe in a strong gleam of sunshine, with his back to the stable pump, and wondering what was to be done with Acheron at the end of the season. "We can't have such a brute as that in the stable any longer; he couldn't even win the Pumpington Handicap, for the boy isn't born that could steer him under 12 or 13 stone at least; and that being far above Mr. Jolly's cut, I wonder who'll have the luck to get him. I'm blest if here ain't his murderer—it wasn't a bad idea of Mr. Munster's; it's frightened the little man above a bit, I know." Indeed, Mr. Cutpurse had not the most cheerful-looking countenance in the world; and his very gingerly way of walking gave him the appearance of a cat going to steal Devonshire cream in the absence of the dairymaid. The sight of Mr. Drinkwater was unexpected, and did not seem to afford him any remarkable gratification. To avoid him, however, was impossible.

"Mornin', sir; none the worse for the ride yesterday, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no! not at all: all the better, thank you. Terrible business about the poor horse. What could it have been from?"

"Terrible! I suppose you never was on such a horse before?"

"Never!" and Mr. Cutpurse was about to add something about his determination never to go on such another again, if he knew it, when he was cut short by Mr. William Drinkwater—

"No; I dare say not. The best horse in these parts, and such a stayer! But you was too hard upon him, indeed you was, sir; and you went miles out of your line, and yet there he was, as one might say, overhauling the hounds at every step. 'Pon my word, it is a terrible business. We daren't tell master: dash my wig, if I know what 'ud happen?"

"Moses! what a piece of ill-luck, to be sure! and I must go by the train."

"Going by the train? I don't know how we shall ever tell master: the most valuable horse we had in the stable; and he's been a keeping him for you!—I heard him say so—and

now he's dead! Such is life." And here Billy looked profoundly solemn.

Cutpurse contemplated the carriage-house weather-cock, a fox in full sail up-wind, and was silent. At length he resumed—"Well, now, what do you suppose such a horse as—as—as—that one is worth?" He forbore to mention the name, because he had forgotten it, or from delicacy to Mr. Drinkwater's feelings.

"What's he worth? Why, thirty shillings, I should say."

"I mean if he was alive, you know;" and the Jew blushed at his own temerity.

"Oh, ah! You mean what was his price afore you killed him, sir. Ah! now I see. I always said, says I, that little gent's a-going to behave like a gentleman. Ah! it's a deal of money for a stiff 'un, too." As Cutpurse didn't quite understand the drift of this, he waited patiently while Mr. Drinkwater summed up in his own mind the real marketable value of the horse when alive. "The actual value of an animal of that stamp to a hunting man, a man really fond of riding a good horse to hounds, is about three hundred. He was worth more to us, because we're short of horses, and he was a sound, good horse, cut and come again, you know, sir; besides, between ourselves, he'd have won the Pumpington steeplechase, and our own, most likely. Lor'! he'd a been worth a thousand pounds in a couple of months." And when Mr. Drinkwater looked up to see the effect his words had produced, he was perfectly astounded at the result of his own oratory. So horribly aghast did the little lawyer seem, that in very pity he hastened at once to relieve his mind to a certain extent of the vague impression of the mischief he had done to his host, which he did after the following fashion: "However, it's no use vexing you about that; you couldn't tell anything about it; and I always says, if gentlemen will lend valuable steeplechase horses, they oughtn't to expect more than a fair return for them, if any little accident does happen."

"A return? oh! yes, to be sure. I see," said Cutpurse, seeing nothing but Crackenthorpe's horror at the fatal termination of the affair.

"I suppose, sir, you never had such a thing happen to you afore?"

"Oh, dear, no! And I haven't the least idea what to do. I'm sure I'm as sorry as if it had been one of my own. What can I do?" The inquiry was not made with a view to an answer; it was rather an hysterical exclamation; but it got one immediately.

"Well! you know, sir, custom regulates all such things. If such a thing happened to me, why, as a poor man, putting the horse's value at a fair price, I shouldn't expect to pay above half,

not if I kill'd him by fair riding. But, you see, gentlemen's different, and I dare say you wouldn't like to offer less than two hundred."

"Offer less than two hundred!" repeated Cutpurse, mechanically.

"Well, say a hundred and fifty, perhaps: not offer it to Mr. Crackenthorpe as a present, you know—blow'd if I should like to be the man to do that. He's uncommon quiet till he's put out; but this here death in the family will stir him up a bit. No, no, sir; you just take my advice."

"Well, tell me what I ought to do—of course I must do something handsome."

Billy pursed up his mouth, rolled out a long whiff of reluctant tobacco, and proceeded:

"You musn't know that the horse is dead; that's the gentlemanly way to do it: then you must write to say how pleased you was with Acheron's performance, and that if Mr. Crackenthorpe will part with him, say at a hundred and fifty or two hundred, you should like to have him. Of course master understands this, and he says to all his friends what a liberal gent the gentleman is as killed Acheron; and, the horse being dead, of course he declines to sell him; and then you sends him down a hamper of the very best claret as can be got for love or money, and you're friends for the rest of your lives. And, now, sir, shall I send Jem for a fly for the next train?"

"No, thank you, I'll go myself," said the little money-lender, mindful of a tip to Jem, and at the same time disbursing a sovereign to Billy, whom he looked upon as the pleasantest fellow he had seen since his arrival in Lushenham. Long before the return of the sportsmen, Mr. Cutpurse was on his way to Holborn, determined upon doing a handsome thing at very little expense.

After the breaking up of this cheerful party, things assumed their ordinary form, excepting that Captain Stuart liked his quarters so much that he proposed to remain a little time: and what with sending for a couple of horses to Pumpington, which he did under the sanction of Tom Crackenthorpe, and being alternately mounted by Tom and Munster, the Captain had rather the best of the riding. However, the season drew to a close, and he was going to give his friends his services for the steeplechases, which he offered in a most disinterested manner. It is but justice to his discrimination to add that he meant squaring the account by some sort of book, as soon as the weights were out; and indemnification taken in his own hands was not likely to fall short of his deserts.

Munster went on love-making. He had had some practice in early life, and, as he observed, he intended doing the right thing

by his tradespeople whenever he got the money, which quieted his conscience to a certain extent. The Vicar was not a man of keen judgment, and gave his consent with some vague idea that a man with a horse or two was a great sportsman, and that a great sportsman must be a great catch. As to the money, well ! the Bar was a profession, and it was quite clear his father must be liberal in his allowance. The Gorgon had some misgivings, but she calmed her perturbation by observing that, as the gentleman did not ask for money, it was not her business to moot the question ; and a fine old Irish family, and a connection with a former Ministry, although now out, which would have made old Munster an Indian judge, or given him the monopoly of leather breeches to the South Sea islanders, satisfied all scruples. The young lady was unmistakably and supremely happy. Herr Bob, as she called the happy *Verlobte*, was everything, could do everything, had everything : and when he talked, as he sometimes did, of literature, she pictured a rush of publishers to get the first refusal of the new work, at, say, nothing under five thousand pounds. Considering how little she knew of the world, and the value of a well-blooded sensation novel, with a dash of murder, bigamy, and adultery in it, she was not exorbitant in her expectations.

Crackenthorpe's suit prospered just as suits always do when there's plenty of money and no pluck. Twenty times he had screwed himself up, and as often he came down again with a run. But he was attentive as ever, and the widow twice as discreet. It is no use to conceal the fact that that artful woman meant marrying, and nothing presented itself within several points of Tom's form. Had Munster only been a little more shy than he was, perhaps he might have taken longer to jump into the trap that was set for him, and eventually avoided it. Marriage is marriage with a good many women, and Mrs. Partington was one of these, with all her sagacity and decorum. Matilda was not a bad-looking girl : and she would have preferred a landed estate, or something tangible in the Three per Cents. ; but, failing that, the girl was to be married, and there was an end of the business. The widow's mother, on the contrary, was a vulgar old woman, and she knew it ; so she did not interfere with her daughter's game ; and Mrs. Greystoke knew quite enough of shy birds to reflect that bread crumbs injudiciously administered were just as likely to frighten them away as anything else. She bided her time, though she once or twice thought of a counter-irritant.

We said that Captain Stuart accompanied Tom and Munster on hunting mornings. Not being much given to ladies' society, above all in the hunting-field, it is not extraordinary that he should have gone out three or four times without remarking upon the extra-



ordinary beauty of the widow, or on the attention which his host continued to pay her. He only saw that she rode well and quietly, and, when the hounds ran, got out of the way, as she ought to do; and it seemed to him that his friend Tom did the same—he had not formed an exalted opinion of that gentleman's performance. It is right to add that Mrs. Partington had ordered the hat and cockatoo's wings to be dismounted as soon as ever Munster had made his offer, and the grey cob had returned to his duty between the shafts. The Bashi-Bazouk cousin was taken off guard and allowed to ride where he liked; and the habit and feathers were put on one side for Miss Josephine, when she would be considered old enough to make profitable use of them.

However, before Captain Stuart had been very long at Lushenham, he managed to get a very near sight of the beauty; it happened in a singular manner, and produced equally singular results.

The hounds had been running their fox pretty hard for about fifteen minutes one morning, when Mrs. Greystoke found herself alone; not with them, but utterly lost. Whether her friend Tom had been caught by the pleasures of an unexpectedly good start, or, what is equally probable, whether he had unwittingly lost sight of the widow, I can't tell: all I know is that Tom Crackenthorpe was not in Rosebury Lane, at least half a mile from the hounds, and the widow was.

"Now," said she to herself—and people do not always speak to themselves in the choicest language they can make use of before company—"here 's a pretty kettle of fish. Where, in the name of Fortune, have I got to? and where are the hounds? This comes of the timid and respectable. If my young man don't look after me a little better than this, or give himself a legal right to do so by coming to the point at once, I shall take to the old style again. I do hate this macadamizing process—but it's a long lane that hasn't a turning. He's not likely to see me, if I take a jump now, I suppose."

Just at that moment a horseman emerged from a hand-gate close by, and followed her up the lane at a pretty good pace. He also said to himself, in the conversational tone more fitted for very inanimate use than public airing—"Here's a woman! Now, what the d—l can she be doing here? They're always in the way. Not a bit of use trying to catch the hounds. I presume this is the line, and I must trust to a nick. Wonderfully compact lot that in front!"

In the meantime, Mrs. Greystoke, tired of the squelching mud of Rosebury Lane, determined upon quitting it; and seeing an apparently practicable fence, and no one looking on, she sent the wiry bay horse at it.

"Bravo!" said Stuart, involuntarily, who was just about the

place where her ugly boy ought to have been with the second horse, but that he was some distance off, enjoying himself with the hounds; "that 's deuced well done—looks like a drop!"

And he proceeded to pull his horse together before following her example. It was well he did so; for, on looking over the fence, to his amazement, not to say horror, he saw a moderately sized pond, with a horse, and a woman, and a hat, and a habit, and a quantity of light brown hair, not by any means so compact a lot as it was a few minutes ago.

"Now, that's what I call pleasant. I can't let the woman drown, and she certainly will if I don't get to her somehow."

So turning over the fence a little lower down, Stuart rushed at once to the rescue. She was already struggling up the bank, and a hand from her preserver, as she poetically christened him on the spot, being ignorant of his proper name, helped to extricate her in a curious condition. When she emerged from the water, her skirt was nearly off, her hair floated all over her shoulders, and she had lost her hat—at least, if a thing whose whereabouts you know well can be said to be lost. Her upper person was dripping with water, her lower with mud. Her horse was getting out lower down. Having seen him safely landed, she turned to thank the unknown who had so opportunely arrived; when, just as he was about to express delicate fears lest she might have sustained some injury, he was startled by an exclamation of some vigour, and

"Why, George, you don't mean——"

"God bless my soul! Sophy, do you mean——"

And there can be no doubt that we should have heard what they both did mean, only at the moment their former prayers for a nick seem to have been answered; for the hounds came through the hedge, and foremost in the ruck that followed was Tom Crackenthorpe.

"All right!" said the one, with a most unfeminine wink.

"Mum's the word!" replied the other.

And in a moment the lady was receiving the condolences and attentions of the whole field. One man proposed to part with his own hat; another, by dint of dexterity which would have done honour to Poole's foreman, pinned up the tattered skirt; another produced a dry pair of Berlin gloves; and half a dozen at once recommended the masculine substitute for aromatic salts in the contents of their flasks and sandwich-boxes. The lady behaved remarkably well upon the occasion, and accepted the attentions and drinks with as many wry faces as becomes a lady of the first quality. But for a fortunate cast of Mr. Bumby, who paid no attention whatever to these irregularities, they might have spent the day in administering consolation; the hounds,

however, hit off the scent, and a general scatter took place, in which Captain Stuart joined. Tom was most unfortunately left behind with the lady; and having blown up the boy for his carelessness, and escorted his mistress to a village inn, where he was so fortunate as to get her a fly on its way from the Bundelcombe Station, he saw her safe into the carriage, and parted with the most impressive grasp of the hand that can well be conceived. Tom lit an enormous regalia, and was not fool enough to go in search of the hounds. He rode home in remarkably good spirits on that occasion, and not too fast. He loved to chew the cud of so pleasing a catastrophe in his every-day life. So he took another pull at his orange brandy, of which the widow had left just a thimble-full; and having assured himself, by inspection of a small portmanteau, that he was not likely to be short of cigars, proceeded to think at a foot's pace.

"I know what my mother would say. 'She'd say, 'Tom, what a d—d fool you must be to go marrying a woman that you know nothing about, when with your income you might do so much better.' I know she wants me to marry Lucy Butterton, because she'll have all the Buttercup property when her grandfather dies. But what's the use of a lot of money to a fellow that's got as much as he wants? and what's the use of money at all if you can't have the woman you want? I know some fellows say that all the women go for money. I don't believe that. Dashi'd if I think Mrs. Greystoke cares about my money; 'pon my soul, I do think she is very fond of me. What a rum old girl her mother is! We should have to keep her out of sight; I couldn't stand that; and as to my mother, when they met—oh, lor'!—the little woman would go stark-staring mad at the very sight of the old woman! Hallo! Stuart, where the deuce did you spring from?"

"We lost our fox somewhere near those woods to the left; and, as there was no chance of a run, and I want this horse again on Thursday, I cut it."

"Did you do anything after I left?"

"Not much. We dragged on for about thirty minutes; but scent failed us altogether; and that cover looks interminable: they say the earths are open, too. What became of that Mrs.—Mrs.—What's her name, the woman that fell into the water? She's a friend of yours, isn't she?"

"Oh! I know of her, of course," said Tom, as if it was rather a hardship, or that he had struggled against the acquaintance-ship. "I know her, of course; she lives in our village, you know. I put her into a fly at Toppington Green, and sent her home. But how in the world came you two in the water together?"

"Well, Soph—, she, Mrs. Thingumybob rode at a fence out of a lane, and I happened to be going for the same place, and caught sight of her and her horse parted company, and struggling about in a pond; I suppose she was over the fence before she saw the pond. She couldn't have meant to jump it, she's too good a judge for that."

"Rather a nice-looking woman; didn't you think so?"

"Oh! tol lol for that," said Stuart; "capital horsewoman, and as hard as nails."

"Well; I shouldn't have said that," said Cracks; "neat enough on a horse; but she never rides at all."

"Don't she, begad?" rejoined the other; and, here recollecting himself suddenly, he added, "Well, she looks like it. Is that the woman Munster calls the widow?"

"That's the woman; you'll be for making up to her?"

"Any money?" demanded Stuart, laconically.

"Must have something, you know. She lives quietly enough; but the two horses and the boy in boots cost a trifle. He's a terrible boy."

"Is he? And has she any other adjuncts down here besides the boy and the nags?"

"Nothing but a mother—an awful old woman—and a piano."

"Did you ever hear her sing or play?" and Stuart waited rather impatiently for the answer to so common a question.

"Well, she does play and sing a little; not well, however. You're particular in your inquiries, Stuart, if you don't mean business."

"What a clever devil it is!" (*sotto voce*). "Well, perhaps I do mean business, you know. I shouldn't mind betting a trifle either that I succeed, if I find the money all right."

"I'll lay you a hundred pounds you don't, if you like to book it," said Tom, somewhat piqued at the free and easy manner of talking of his Dulcibella.

"Well, then, done with you! She'll be my wife, if I choose to make her an offer, sooner than yours."

"All right, old fellow! put it down; you can ask me to be best man when it comes off;" and Tom put his horse into a jog, just to keep down his temper.

By the time they reached home they were just as happy as usual; and, as Lord Cropperton came to dinner to talk over the steeplechase and other matters connected with horseflesh, conversation did not flag. Munster was in unusually good spirits; and it crept out by slow degrees, in an underhand sort of way, that affairs at the Pasonage were all right, and a termination put to his anxieties. The wedding was to take place the first of May.

"Why not April?" asked his lordship.

"I couldn't have asked my friends without being personal," said Bob.

"But why the first of May, then?" asked Crackenthorpe; "sort of fête-day, regular holiday, in fact."

"It is for the sweeps: Bob's relatives want to come to the wedding," said Lord Cropperton, laughing. "He'll play Jack-in-the-green. Joking apart, Munster, it's rather short notice, isn't it?"

"Lots of bills coming due in June and July, so I couldn't put it off any longer; and then we're off to Ireland for the autumn. I shall come back and live cleanly after that. A quiet little house somewhere in the Regent's Park, and just a brougham for two months of the season. Happy to see you fellows. And now let's have a little chicken hazard; we shan't have many more opportunities."

"Stop, we want to settle about the weights for the steeplechase," said Cropperton. And accordingly Tom Crackenthorpe and he put their heads together, while Munster and Stuart began calling mains.

"Seven it is; that's three to me," said Munster. "Seven again; confound it! That's crabs. One to you. That's ten pounds."

"I think seven pounds is enough to give. Did you say ten, Bob?"

"Yes: that makes three more, Stuart," chimed in Munster.

"Every fool knows that," said Crackenthorpe, looking at his list; "but I don't see why he should have more than seven."

"Only because he owes me thirteen; that's all."

"Ah! confound your hazard! I was talking about Sawbones's mare for the steeplechase. Are you going to run anything for yourself?"

"Yes, I shall run something. I mean to make some money or lose it. It's the last chance I shall have; so I shall put by enough for the wedding presents, and sport the rest."

Stuart confined himself exclusively to the hazard and regalias: he talked less than usual, and when he announced his intention of leaving in a day or two, he rather excited the astonishment of his two entertainers, whose experience induced them to regard him, however fast, as a remarkably good stayer.

Two or three days after he did go; and while Tom and his friend were regretting the vacancy caused by his absence on a non-hunting day, and had just determined upon a visit to some livery-stables at Pumpington in search of a steeplechaser, the post arrived.

The first was a letter of invitation; the second of acceptance;

the third from an impoverished schoolmaster in want of a loan; the fourth a circular on the subject of fine old port at 2*s.* 6*d.* a dozen; the fifth from a baby-linen warehouse; three were bills; and one was a lawyer's letter evidently. Before putting it behind the fire, Tom thought it desirable to read it; so he broke the seal, ran his eye down the contents, witnessed the hand and seal of Cutpurse, and then went into a most unearthly yell of mingled astonishment and delight.

"What the deuce is the meaning of all this?" said he.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### ACHERON REDIVIVUS.

AT that moment Munster was engaged with devilled kidney and a muffin; but, hearing his appeal, he stayed operations, and took up the letter, which Crackenthorpe passed across the table to him. He read it without that expression of surprise which was so evident on the face of his companion; and then, having finished his cup of tea, said:

"Upon my soul, Tom, that's more than could have been expected from one of his persuasion."

"But have you read what he says about the pleasures of his ride?"

"Certainly; and I think he has taken a very curious view of what he calls a little accident or two; he hasn't the slightest idea how near he was being killed: but I suppose you won't ask him any more for that; his offer seems pretty liberal."

"As he didn't break any limbs, a hundred and fifty is almost enough for the horse: a leg or an arm would have brought him up to three hundred at least." Tom was so delighted at the prospect that he lit a regalia, and drank the Jew's health in a pewter which graced the breakfast-table. "Read it out, Bob."

Bob complied.

" '103, Pluckham Court, High Holborn.

" 'MY DEAR SIR,—I take an early opportunity of thanking you and my old friend Mr. Munster' [Confound his impudence!] 'for the delightful holiday I passed at your chattow. Business

of great importance obliged me to leave your hospitable mansion unexpectedly; I hope you had a good hunt in my absence. The hurry in which I left Lushenham prevented me making those inquiries after the magnificent quadruped I rode, which of course I should have done, especially as I fear I was a little hard upon him.'

"What fools we must have been! we thought it was the other way."

"I hope I am not taking too great a liberty in asking whether you could be prevailed upon to part with so valuable an animal. He carried me so much to my satisfaction, excepting a little accident or two, that I would willingly become a purchaser. I hardly know how to put a proper estimate on so valuable a horse; but if 150*l.* is any inducement to you to part with him, I shall be most happy to send you a check on the receipt of the horse: he could come up by rail, and be sent on to me at my little place at Clapham, No. 21, Bunkum Villas, Streatham Road. I am not a great hunter, being usually occupied during the day; but I think I could snatch a Saturday now and then, to enjoy a little sport with the Tooting harriers; and the ride to and from Holborn would keep me in exercise.'

"I should think it would. What do you say, Tom?"

"I'd as soon ride him down Holborn as go to Tyburn in a cart."

"He'll never suffer again from dyspepsia after one such morning's exercise, at all events. He'd better alter his name."

"To what?"

"The Doctor—if he don't cure him he'll kill him. But there's a postscript."

"I hope you will excuse me if I have taken a liberty, or done anything to disparage the horse by my offer."

"On the contrary, old boy; such a bit of ginger hasn't been his for many a long day. 150*l.*! Why, he's not much short of twenty years old, is he Tom?"

"He's old enough to know better than he does. What's that about his clothes?"

"Oh! he says—

"I have forwarded some things that belong to Mr. Munster and your friend Captain Stuart, which were packed up with mine by accident. Would you allow your servant to forward the

rest of my wardrobe: a dress-coat, and other things? and believe me, faithfully yours,

“ ‘ISAAC CUTPURSE.’ ”

“What does he mean by his clothes? How should I know anything about his dress-coat and other things?” said Tom, rather indignantly.

“He means the rest of his boots; there was but one and a half left, and Billy Drinkwater gave them to your gardener to put on the scarecrow in the peas which are just sown. You don’t mean to refuse?”

“Not I. It’s the first time I knew his value. Every man to his taste; but he didn’t look as if he was enjoying himself much when he came out of the hazel copse and went up the hill towards the big bullfinch.”

“He didn’t look happy either when I met him on the stairs after his return. I suppose that walk taught him the value of horseflesh. He left a large piece of Billy Drinkwater’s breeches somewhere, and the pockets were quite full of mud. Billy looked very closely to see if there wasn’t a half-sovereign sticking in it, but he only found a toothpick and a halfpenny.” Here they rose; and Bobby having lit a cigar, he sauntered towards the stables.

Mr. William Drinkwater was just completing his toilet. The principal instrument of his personal decoration at that moment was a small tooth-comb, with which he appeared to be drawing off the water from his head. On Munster’s arrival he suspended his operations from before the fragments of a small looking-glass, and, with an expression of much simplicity, said—

“Well, sir, any news this morning?”

“What do you think of a hundred and fifty for Acheron?” rejoined his second master.

“Ought to have drawn Moses for two hundred.”

“Why, Billy, you’re the biggest Jew of the two! Surely it’s a good price for a dead ’un!”

“Many a ‘stiff ’un’ makes a deal more money than that,” said the stud-groom, sententiously. “Don’t know nothing about it, does he?” added he, with a nod towards the house.

“Not if you hav’n’t told him. He looked awfully astonished at such a bid from such a customer.”

“No! I hav’n’t said anything to him. Lor’! bless you, he’s so simple: it’s a lucky thing he’s got some one to look after his interests.”

“He’ll be here in a minute. When had we better send him up?”

“As soon as ever he’s dressed over: we’ll send him off to the



station at once. Strike while the iron's hot. If Mr. Crackenthorpe was to find it out, he'd be as difficult to persuade as the other."

"I suppose Mr. Munster has told you we've had a bit for Acheron," said Tom Crackenthorpe, walking into the stable at that moment, and twisting a cigar in his mouth.

"Yes, he's said something about it; and how much have you got for him?"

"A hundred and fifty. Pretty good price, isn't it?"

"No ways too much; look how he carried the gent. Never tumbled much, and he hanging round his neck half the time Dash'd if he ain't a wonderful 'oss; don't want no riding; best horse we got."

"When shall we send him away?" said Tom, half afraid Mr. Drinkwater might be for keeping him—at least his share of him.

"Are you sure o' the money? 'Cos I ain't so fond o' them Abrahmites."

"Yes, that s pretty safe; what do you think, Bob?"

As Bob was pretty deep in the lawyer's books himself, he could afford to sell on the chance; so he said so. Mr. Drinkwater was lost in doubt.

"If he hasn't got it handy, he knows where to get it, I suppose," at last said he. "He's sure to have his hand in somebody's pocket at this very moment. Perhaps you'd better send him a telegram, and send the 'oss off by the next train."

"Rather sharp practice that, Billy."

"No sharper than his own, I'll be bound. Besides, I've known 'em die in a night, and then he'd be uncommonly disappointed. Pity to keep the gent waitin', if he's so very sweet on the 'oss."

Tom was not convinced; but he took out the letter, and gave his faithful retainer the necessary direction, to be forwarded to Bunkum Villas, Streatham Road, Clapham, for Isaac Cutpurse, Esq. Having made his mind easy on that point, the master and his friend left the stable, and went in search of a steeplechase horse to Pumpington.

Cutpurse, the morning after he had despatched his letter, rose in remarkably good spirits. He felt that he had done the correct thing, and, what was more, at very little expense. So elated was he with this position, a very new one to him, that he determined upon embarking in a little dinner.

It was a windy afternoon in the end of March, on the day on which the foregoing discussion had taken place, and which, as we see, had ended by leaving the matter very much in Mr. Drinkwater's hands, that the crafty lawyer, retiring to an inner room, washed his hands, and brushed his coat, turned down the wrist-

bands of his shirt, resettled his collar and neckcloth, and rang his bell.

"Jenkins."

"Sir," said that hungry-looking functionary, appearing with a sheet of copying-paper in his hand, and a pen behind his ear.

"Has Shuffleton been here to-day about that money?" inquired Cutpurse.

"He came this afternoon, and said you must renew."

"What's his furniture worth?"

"Not very good; all the rosewood's painted, and the hair sofa and chairs is stuffed with cotton wool. He said something about his wife and children."

"They arn't worth much, I suppose. How much did he have in cash?"

"One hundred and fifty, and one hundred in pictures. He sold them, and we bought 'em back at fifteen pound ten."

"Ah! they'll do again. No, we can't renew: our client wants money; give him a week; and if he comes here, I'm always in the country. When's Mr. Munster due?"

"The fifteenth of April. Anything about him?"

"He's all right; accommodate him at a reasonable figure, say 35 to 40 per cent. He's going to be married; they always pay."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going now for good;" and with an extra polish to his hat, Mr. Cutpurse started for his nice little dinner at Simpson's.

A nice little dinner among three fasting Israelites, when aided by the charms of sharp practice and successful robbery, is apt to last some time. The three friends grew very talkative, and the host entertained his guests with his late fashionable sport in the provinces. His prowess in having killed a horse tickled his companions mightily; and they didn't seem to know whether it was to be considered a mark of their host's capability as a sportsman or not. He evidently regarded it in that light himself. After the port and sherry, of which they partook pretty freely, there came cigars and gin and water; and when Mr. Cutpurse looked at his watch, he found it was verging towards midnight. With a journey to Clapham before him, he thought it late enough; but he was too polite to say so, so instead he proposed one more cigar. To his horror it was accepted by these gay young bachelors, who had no fear of Mrs. Cutpurse before their eyes. Young fellows are so inconsiderate.

At length he started. Well he might; for his shadow by the gas-lamps made some very eccentric movements from one side of the pavement to the other; and Cutpurse was quite sober enough to see it. He felt very much inclined to quarrel with his shadow,

which was now short, now tall; and then suddenly lurched right into the road. Most extraordinary thing he ever saw in his life. Had he known anything about Chamisso and Peter Schlemihl, he would have remembered his remedy for having none at all, and have called a cab. He would have done so, but unfortunately there was none at hand. Could not be intoxicated; quite impossible! which he ascertained beyond all doubt by wishing good-night, in a very loud tone of voice, to every policeman he met.

"Hallo!" said a sober citizen, up against whom he lurched in a very suspicious manner: "where are you going to?"

"Where I going to? why (hic-cough), home, to be sure."

"Well, stupid, you don't live in my waistcoat-pocket, do you?"

After a while he threw away his cigar: then he stopped, took off his hat, looked at the moon, and distinctly remarked the halo round her; carefully separated two sovereigns and a half, which he had received in change, from some silver in his right-hand pocket, and transferred it to his left; called a cab which was luckily passing, and got in with the loss of nothing but his hat, which rolled off from the door being lower and narrower than usual.

"Home, cabby; go home;" which cabby literally did; and half-an-hour afterwards he was aroused from a comfortable nap to find himself in a stable-yard near the "Horns," at Kennington. It took a little time to explain matters, and when they were explained he started on his road once more. He stopped the cab a quarter of a mile from his own house, quarrelled about the fare, which he compromised for half-a-crown by the assistance of a policeman, and went cheerfully to his little villa in the Streatham Road.

His nap had done him good: he was in a remarkably jovial humour; on good terms with himself and everybody; and, like all really honest and prosperous money-makers, had forgotten everything but the necessity of getting up-stairs without being caught.

"Hang the key! it's got something down it," said he, struggling away at the door-latch; and so it had.

After some minutes blowing into it, and several attempts to find a pin on the door-step, he began to see the necessity of ringing. He looked down into the area first; and, to his great delight, between the shutters he saw a light.

"Somebody burning the candles. Confound that Jemima! However, it's lucky she's up: hope she ain't robbing the house with her young man." So he ventured to ring the area-bell very gently.

Jemima wasn't long in coming out. "Who's there?"

"It's me."

"Ah, but I wants to know who's me," said Jemima, holding up a dip, which was immediately extinguished by a sou'-wester.

"Why, me—Mr. Cut—Cut—you know," said the master, rather indistinctly. "Don't make a noise."

Jemima disappeared, and in a minute afterwards was unbar-  
ring the front door.

"Lucky," thought Cutpurse to himself. "All right. Never felt better in my life. Gad! that last quarter of a mile has quite freshened me up. I wonder what Jemima's young man's like."

Here he found his way into the passage, and falling over the umbrella-stand, was brought up by the stairs, the villa not being quite a Belgravian mansion.

"Please, sir, there's a young man been in the kitchen—"

"I know there has—young man been a-kissling; but Jemima, we don't allow"—Here he winked at Jemima, and attempted to chuck her under the chin.

"I said in the kitchen. Lor' bless the man! what's the matter with him? Surely he's daft." Jemima was rather provincial at times.

"Mr. Cutpurse! sir!"

Cutpurse looked up, and there, on the stairs, at the first landing was Mrs. C. She was remarkable for a hooked nose, a sharp tongue, dirty curl-papers, a good deal of superfluous eyebrow, and and the name of Rachel. At this moment she was clothed in a brown-holland wrapper of some sort, and a thing that looked very like a flannel petticoat was round her head.

"Cutpurse, you're intoxicated."

"Indeed, Rachel, you'll catch cold; the wind's very high."

"You've been drinking, sir; you're intoxicated."

"Not a drop—not a bit that is." And to do him justice, the sudden appearance of his wife had had a marvellous effect upon him.

"Go down, sir, and see to that 'orsin' fellow you've brought here to disturb your wife and family. Go down, and mind the candle. I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself, with your 'orsin,' blackleggin' fellows, eatin' and drinkin' here till past midnight."

"My dear," remonstrated the now sober Mr. Cutpurse.

"Don't talk to me, but go down and see that racin' huntin' scamp that's drinking gin and water in your kitchen."

And thus violently adjured, the master of the house, utterly dumbfounded, took the light out of Jemima's hand, and proceeded to do as he was bid.

True enough, in the kitchen sat a very respectable man, not particularly the worse for liquor, dressed somewhat like a groom out of place, who, having been made aware, by the complimentary language on the stairs, that the gentleman was come home,

had finished his glass, smoothed his hair, and stood ready to receive him, hat in hand.

"Well, my man," said Cutpurse, "what 's this?"

"Brought a 'oss over from the station this arternoon, sir, and was ordered to give this note into your own hand, and see as you got it safe."

Cutpurse opened the note, and after reading a few lines, uttered a faint exclamation, turned suddenly green, and dropped quietly into the arm-chair which the cook had so lately vacated.

"When did you get this?" gasped the penitent Israelite.

"Come up along with the 'oss."

"And where 's the horse?" inquired the gentleman most concerned in knowing.

"There warn't no stablin' here, so I left him at the 'Three Balls.' Told 'em to give him as much as he could eat, and take greatest care on him, 'cos he's a valuable 'oss, said I, and I know'd you wouldn't like nothin' but what was right. Nice 'oss he is, only got a bit o' temper of his own. Kicked off two on 'em—one 's gone to the infirmary—so they sent me with him. Wasn't goin' to get rid o' me that way. But he ain't altogether a nice 'un to ride."

Cutpurse read the note again. It was in Billy Drinkwater's hand, and was laconic enough, but to the purpose. It ran as follows:—

"Lushenham, March.

"SIR,—Herewith sends you the horse. Glad you has got him, as he'll make a most valuable hunter to any gent as can ride him. He kicks a bit at startin'; but that's all play. Master will rite to-morrow morning. Please send back the clothing. Yours to command,

"WILLIAM DRINKWATER, Esq.,

"at Mr. Crackenthorpe's.

"To Mr. Cutpurse, &c. &c."

The lawyer read the note over and over again. There was no mistake about it; and there sat the living messenger of all his ills. Why the deuce hadn't the horse killed him on the road, and run away with the note and the body? No: there he was safe and sound, handed over to him, Cutpurse. And then that villanous whip's warning voice came once more over the spirit of his memory: "Broke his back? I'm blowed if he won't break your neck!" &c. &c. And to-morrow morning was to bring him a letter, probably to tell him the name of the banker to whom the check might be made payable. A cheque for 150*l.*, and Acheron still alive!

"Well," said Cutpurse, waking up from his agreeable reverie,

"all right, all right. I suppose that's all? Needn't keep you up any longer."

"Just this little account for the horse, sir, and my expenses. Deal o' trouble with him. One pound nine and sixpence and a receipt for the company."

"Confound it all!" said Cutpurse diving into his pocket, and fishing up all his silver. "Oh, I know! All right," said he diving again into the other pocket, and fishing up nothing at all. Confound! Oh, Moses! Moses! Dash my wig! No! Yes! No! Yes! yes; I've gone and given those two sovereigns and a half to that beast of a cabman; You must call to-morrow, you must—all my money's gone." And with vehement lamentations he went forth from his kitchen.

However second thoughts are best; so, consulting a bureau up stairs he at length dismissed the man, after a good row over the expenses, and retired to bed, but not to sleep. Mrs. C. was not a woman to be put off with any nonsense: before morning she knew all the ins and the outs of Cutpurse's unlucky purchase, excepting what he paid for it; and to simplify the calculation, he just knocked off the hundred.

In all his misfortunes he had one consolation. He was sure of an invitation to the château (perhaps in the summer) when the amusements were less dangerous than at the present season. At all events—it might take time—but he saw his way into a good many hundred-and-fifties through his visit to Lushenham.

During the three whole days did Mrs. Cutpurse launch her thunderbolts against the nasty racin' and huntin' lot that had led Mr. C. astray; had her own way for a month; and was at length over-bribed and silenced by a dinner at Gravesend, a new bonnet, and an evening at Rosherville. Long before that Acheron had kicked off half the Jews in London, and was at last bought at Aldridge's by a hard-riding cavalry man, who rode him as second charger, and had two days a week with the garrison staghounds into the bargain. He realized 30% at the hammer, and was a very excellent bargain. Amid the surrounding gloom one bright gleam shone out upon Isaac Cutpurse. Robert Munster's bill was punctually met—it is said with part of the money the wretched man had himself disbursed for Acheron. When "stiff-uns" are mentioned in the ring Billy Drinkwater winks his eye, and implies that he once helped to do something in that way too.

Two things delighted the inhabitants of Lushenham and its neighbourhood. There was to be a steeplechase and a match. The former of these two was to take place immediately. The farmers had to be remunerated for their consideration in keeping up the prestige of the Lushenham country as the very stiffest in England; and it was well known that nothing was so calculated

to repay them for the mischief already done as to give them an opportunity of doing it over again for themselves. "No, no," said these jolly dogs, "we don't want money." You're welcome to ride over the crops, gentlemen, and break the fences. To be sure, there's no denying it does harm when the wheat carries a bit, and the seeds 'specially arn't the better for it. But I'll tell ye what 'll put it all straight. Let's have a steeplechase over this very country. None o' your cast-off racehorses, but hunters every one of 'em—12 st. 7 lbs. gentlemen or farmers to ride; none o' your professionals, but a real honest set-to among ourselves. If you want to see the other sort of thing you can go to Liverpool, or some o' them national affairs; if you want to see hunters, why, they can come here, you know." With such sentiments as these, there was no difficulty at all. Subscriptions poured in from every side. There were stewards without number, some of whom forgot the very existence of such a place as Lushenham: plenty of forfeits, which were regarded as an excellent sort of joke, payable on Aldgate Pump; and the most accommodating secretary, who seemed to have no fixed idea as to the closing of the stakes. However, like everything else, this had a termination at last, and the stakes did close. There were about thirty entries, half of which were unmistakable starters, candidates for Downshire; and amongst them were Lord Cropperton, the sporting Doctor, Mr. Falconberg Smith, Tom Crackenthorpe, Munster, and a certain Captain Stuart. Every day was now employed in looking over the course, just to see that it had not been tampered with. Occasionally a broken rail was found; Peggs was at once ordered up with stiff timber, hammer and nails. A gap was invariably *mended* with a hog-backed stile. The cows had made the taking off at the water a little sticky; the whole was cut away, "clean and sound" to the tune of a foot and a half or two feet; and when a remonstrance was raised against a really formidable bullfinch, with a very wide ditch on each side, the Doctor proposed to send his boy, to sit close by, with bandages and splints ready for action. He considerably added, "I shall charge nothing for his time, and it will be quite a holiday for him."

Can it be wondered at that beds were taken in the surrounding villages, and stalls and stables secured weeks before; that houses were opened, and dressing-rooms laid down, and bachelors' rooms extemporized, and extra cooks ordered up from Pumpington? Is it extraordinary that the widow indulged in a new habit, or that Tom fell back upon Poole for something with no end of lining, cuffs, collars, and pockets, which made a coat an article of most expensive luxury, and increased its original cost by about two sovereigns, leaving us to wonder what sort of affair it would

have been without those luxurious appendages? Even old Partington stood a couple of new bounets on the occasion, and the old lady ordered a new silk dress and three-quarters of a yard more front, the same colour as before. So much for the preparations for the steeplechase. The match was between Robert Munster, gent., and Matilda Partington, spinster, both of this parish, and was set for the 1st of May.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### COMING DOWN TO RIDE.

IN a country village remote from cities, but devoted to sport, a steeplechase of any kind would have excited a commotion worthy of recognition. The object being, then, to appease the farmers at the expense of the gentlemen, and to test the merits of the weight-carrying hunter, in distinction to the jumping or galloping hack, the reader will not wonder at the preparations recorded in the last chapter. I was not surprised when I heard that Crackenthorpe had filled his house with as many as could well be got into it, reserving a corner for his friend Captain Stuart, whose arrival, however, had been deferred until the morning of the race. Most houses in the neighbourhood had a guest or two of their own, as we have said; but on the night immediately preceding it the rendezvous was at the château, and the generous host and his ally Robert Munster would take no denial. Lord Cropperton was there, and Ned Bingham; the hard-riding Doctor, and his sister, a good-humoured, sensible, well-behaved girl, rather plain than otherwise, who kept the Doctor's books and his house; Captain Gladwish; four bachelors from London, who had already finished the season; and Mrs. Crackenthorpe. This lady had long determined upon a visit, and as it was not Tom's way to turn his back upon his own mother, however inconvenient her coming, he submitted peaceably, and asked the Doctor's sister to keep her company. Emily Gladwish was from home, and he thought Miss Scalpel better company than the Partington division. She had got over the first blush of womanhood, and was more capable of going through the heavy



business than the rest. The unprotected widow was out of the question.

Of course Mrs. Crackenthorpe had a reason for suddenly deserting Torquay and travelling eastward. The reason was as follows:—Some ladies from Leamington visited the place, and with a sincere interest in Tom's welfare, had made some strong representations of the widow's charms. Some said it was a blind only for his real attentions in another quarter; others gave vague hints of a vicar with two daughters, and an invalid captain with one; and between them they fairly frightened Mrs. Crackenthorpe from the comfortable quarters in which she had established herself. So she came to sit at the head of the bachelors' party at Lushenham.

I ought to tell you that Tom was a perfect gentleman in heart and feeling, though sometimes a little rough in manner or speech. His worst enemy could only say that he was fond of his beer in the morning and his claret in the evening; that he smoked regalias in his drawing-room (but then it was his own); and that his dog-carts were apt to be loud. There was nothing in his house to which the purest of mothers or women might not have been introduced. Every comfort and convenience was to be found there; an admirable household, and the best little dinners in the county. He was delighted to have her with him; but the very best woman can come *mal-à-propos*. It was the case at the present moment; but if she did not feel it, why need he or Munster.

No opportunity had yet arrived for the widow Crackenthorpe to be introduced to the widow Greystoke. The former lady did not hunt, and had only seen her once or twice at the cover side from her son's brougham. That and the inquiries she made did not tend to allay her anxieties, and her present desire was that Tom should pay less attention to the widow Greystoke, and more to her.

Women have great quickness of apprehension, and want of charity, in all that concerns their own sex. A bold, dashing, riding female, alone with a mother in a hunting village, might well be an object of suspicion to the simple-minded villagers; that she was so to a lady who had travelled from India to England, through half the capitals in Europe, cannot be wondered at. She had not even the protection of a child, a husband's best representative; nothing but the name of widow to show for the money.

The party had been at table about an hour and a half. The *chapon*, the *écrevisses* had disappeared, and the pudding *au citron* was going its round, when a ring at the door-bell announced an arrival of some kind. No announcement, however, took place;

the ladies went on with their pudding *au citron*, conversation and champagne flowed abundantly, and in five minutes the circumstance was forgotten.

"I hope we shall see Mrs. Crackenthorpe to-morrow," said the Doctor.

"Certainly; but not on horseback. I have offered your sister a seat in the brougham, which I hope she will accept."

"With great pleasure, thank you. My brother does all the riding."

"I suppose we shall have some representatives of our sex, as usual, on horseback?" said the widow a little severely, eyeing her son.

"I shouldn't wonder, mother; some hundreds probably; it's common enough in this country." Tom felt a little savage.

"I should think old Partington will stand the grey again on such an occasion," said a sub in the Guards, who, having once seen the Partington equipage, had not forgotten it.

"I should say not," said Munster; "we shall have the pretty widow, however, without doubt;" glad to turn the conversation from himself, and rather reckless as to where it went.

It is but fair to the Guardsman to say that he knew nothing of Munster's engagement or of Tom Crackenthorpe's infatuation. "You've seen the widow Greystoke, Mrs. Crackenthorpe, I presume?"

"Once or twice," said she, rather sententiously.

"I dislike riding-women (thank you! thought Mrs. Crackenthorpe), they're generally so vulgar, so full of the stable (charming boy that little Guardsman! again thought she); but I must say that Mrs. Greystoke's a beauty (oh! the little horror! almost shrieked Tom's mother); don't you think so, Tom?"

Tom, who was not unaware of his mother's sentiments, though unexpressed, would willingly have annihilated the precocious young monkey, who was fresh from a private tutor's, and ignorant of the locality on which he was dancing, when just at that moment the door opened, and a most unmistakable fracas in the hall reached the dining-room.

"What's the matter, Taplow?"

Taplow was the discreetest of men, and only grunted, shut the door, and began handing the first thing that presented itself to the first person he saw.

"Who's that at the front door, Taplow?"

"It's a-a-person as wishes to see you, sir."

"Well show him into the drawing-room: burgundy to Mr. Scalpel."

"It's not a-a-a-he at all," said the valet, blushing, and endeavouring to make the communication as mysterious as possible.

"What is it then?" said the master, with rising choler, and perfectly innocent of deserving any mystification.

"It's—it's—an hindividual, sir," responded the valet, thus pressed. "Sherry or madeira, ma'am?" continued he, addressing Miss Scalpel, and covering his retreat as well as he could.

"Then send the individual out of the house again, or into the library; and tell them to make less noise."

Let us explain. During the latter part of dinner—in fact, when the bell had been heard to ring—a fly had driven up to the door: on the top of the fly was a portmanteau, and inside a very smartly dressed lady, apparently of middle age, and much given to colours; indeed there was a general amplitude of dress and pattern, and figure altogether, which was apparent on her alighting from the fly and venturing to ask for Mr. Crackenthorpe.

"Mr. Crackenthorpe is at dinner, mum," stammered the servant, "and——"

"Yes, I know he expects me; bring in the portmanteau, and pay the fly."

"Beg pardon, mum, but—but—you see, Mrs. Crackenthorpe's here, and you see, mum, master's——"

"Well, I can't help who's here; I suppose he's got the room he wrote to me to say I could have."

Just then, hearing the altercation, the housemaid appeared.

"Here, Mary Hanne, just come here a minute; this young 'oman says there's a bed for her."

"Go along, stoopid! there ain't no bed here for such as she."

"Well, you go and tell her so."

"I'm sure I shan't; it ain't none o' my business: pretty row there'll be when missus hears of this!"

"Now, then," called out the lady, evidently tired of waiting, "what the devil are you doing in the dark there? Do get a candle, and show me my room: why, the man's a downright idiot."

At that moment Mr. Drinkwater, having just seen all safe for the night in the stable, came up to the hall door. "Why, what's all this? who have you brought over to-night, Giles—Mr. Stuart?"

"No," laughed Giles; "it's a young 'oman as come by the train."

"Oh! a young woman. We'll pretty soon have her out. The master don't stand none o' them games; besides, there's the missus here. Here, I say, my good woman——"

The good woman, who was carrying on a loud altercation with the man who had opened the door, turned round just to say, "Why, you infernal old fool, Billy! don't you——"

"There, that'll do, now, young woman; be off at once. Come,

Giles, bear a hand, and you too, Richard. Bless my soul! I suppose she's got a drop o' drink, and mistook the house. What a way he will be in to be sure!" Saying which, they seized the young woman by the waist, and were struggling manfully at the top step while the young woman bursting with laughter, and half throttling Richard, endeavoured to make herself understood. "I tell you—confound it!—I'm—d—— it, Billy Drinkwater, don't you know me?"

"Know ye? why, in course I do; I knows the whole kit on ye; bad luck to ye all! out ye go! so it ain't no use."

"I tell you, you stupid devil! I'm Stuart—Captain Stuart." But the noise was now outrageous, and Taplow, with a face of horror, came running along the passage, shouting — "Good heavens! what is the matter? You're to go into the library, and wait there."

"Upon my soul, Billy, if you don't let me go, I'll knock your head off your shoulders. You great fool! you've nearly torn my coat off my back. Look at my hat!" said the half-plucked female, giving her bonnet a kick, and pulling off a quantity of false hair, which half smothered her left eye.

"Why, Taplow, surely you know me? now get me a light, pay the cab, and show me up to my room: one would think these people were all mad; they wouldn't listen to a word. They're all mighty virtuous of a sudden." Saying which, he seized upon his candle and was half-way upstairs, whilst Taplow apologised below.

"You see, sir, we never expected you till to-morrow; and Mrs. Crackenthorpe's here, sir—that's the reason Mr. Drinkwater was so very particular, sir. Hot water directly, sir. Richard, take up the portmanteau, and tell Mary Anne not to stand giggling there, but to make haste."

"Please, sir, "it's Captain Stuart," said Taplow, re-entering.

"Then, why didn't you say so before? Let a side-table be put in the room, and the soup be made hot, as soon as he's ready."

"What sort of a person is Captain Stuart, my dear Tom?" said his mother.

"Stuart? oh! quiet fellow enough; you'll like Stuart, my dear mother—don't you think she will, Munster?"

Munster assented.

"I suppose he's quieter when he gets inside?"

"Yes, Mrs. Crackenthorpe; he expends all his energies at the threshold."

"Just what he did with his money on the threshold of life. He lives remarkably well upon what he once had; like the boa constrictor, who subsists for weeks on a single meal, he swallowed all he had in one season."

"Does he ride to-morrow for anyone?" asked Bingham.

"He has a nomination for himself," said Munster, in reply.  
"Who rides for you, Doctor?"

"My brother would not forego the chance of breaking his limbs on any account," said Miss Scalpel. "Which horse is it to be to-morrow, William—the one you can ride, or your groom?"

"The one neither of us can ride; the other two are not fit."

Here Mrs. Crackenthorpe, signing to Miss Scalpel, and seeing that the conversation had taken a professional turn, rose to go to the drawing-room.

They had hardly achieved that feat (it is a feat, with the modern style of dress, excepting in large houses) before Stuart made his appearance.

How are you? delighted to see you. Hope you got everything comfortable, old fellow? We didn't expect you to-night."

"All right: everything very comfortable, thank you," replied he, with his mouth full of soup.

"Tancy that fool Taplow coming in here, and saying first that you were not a He, and then announcing you as a hindividual!"

Not such a fool either. I dare say I did startle them a bit; as to the man called Richard, I'm afraid I nearly strangled him. Sherry? thank you. I'd a bit of an adventure," added the *soi-disant* Captain, this quiet fellow; "but it is all right now. Lucky to get off at all; gad! I thought it was all up at one time. And I bought a horse, too, and entered him. I don't know anything about him: he's a desperate puller, and kicks a bit at starting, but he can go on at a fair pace. I bought him at Tattersall's."

"What do you call him?" asked Crackenthorpe.

"The Devil among the Tailors. The first day I had him he went straight through the glass-doors of a Schneider in Conduit Street, and made his way into the back premises, where he cleared the shop-board in a brace of shakes."

"That doesn't sound promising for our country: there's a post and rail or two here, not quite like a glass-door in Conduit Street," said Lord Cropperton: "you'd better ride my horse; Bingham's going to steer the Squire's. He's bought a grey mare."

"I'll change my lord, if you like: that's as much as I can say."

"But what's that to do with the adventure? Let's have that," said two or three voices at once, with as much eagerness as if it were the only one to be met with in the world.

"How came you to be an individual? Taplow looked as if he had seen a ghost—the ghost, in fact."

"Well, I'll tell you. You all know Stanley Lane, Plimlico? No! Well, it's a quiet place; nobody ever molests one, and the

landlady is an old acquaintance of mine. Accidentally, I was a little hard up, waiting remittances, in fact, and a few little things due since the last Newmarket meeting; nothing to signify, but tradesmen are so confoundedly suspicious. They thought I was going abroad. I often do make a tour; I'm not fond of this climate, in fact. What an excellent salmi! Ah! champagne; thank ye! No—no ice; the wine's too good for that. Well, I looked out of window only yesterday, and saw—gad! sir, what do you think I saw?—hardly believe such a thing in my case; gad! I saw a regular bun-bailiff—sheriff's officer— or whatever you call 'em."

"How in the world did you know that?" asked the young Guardsman, just for information.

"How did I know him? Bless your soul, my dear sir! seen thou—, that is, often read of 'em; Charles Dickens, and so on, you know; quite impossible to mistake—not with one of those descriptions before you."

"Well—what did he do?"

"He didn't do much himself; but, like a dog in the manger, he wouldn't let me do much either. There he was, all day long. There's a public in the street; and when he was gone to dinner I slipped out, but I was forced to slip back again; he was out in a minute. Then I waited till night. Sent the servant to look up the area; there he was still. This wouldn't do; no remittances, so I sent for the landlady. 'What's to be done?' said I. 'Pay him,' said she. 'Where's the money?' said I. 'What! not got the money?' says she. 'Yes, I have,' says I; 'but I mean to keep it.' 'We must manage,' says she; 'wait here; I'll go out; and when I come back, we'll see what can be done.'"

"Oh! the old story. Borrowed the money, I suppose, at five per cent. and lent it to you at thirty?"

"Not at all; she's much too honest for the first, and too wise for the second. She came back with a tallish woman, a mantua maker, or something, friend of her own; no great shakes in the way of beauty—yes, I'll take a little of that pudding, and another glass of that dry sherry—but most stunningly put together; all colours, and such a bonnet! There was nothing for it; I'm not a giant, and she was no dwarf: so I was soon turned into a rather gaudily-dressed female: and, what with a little shaving, a brown front, and a Parisian bonnet, I hardly knew myself. As to the gentleman on the watch, there was no more chance of his recognising his prey than the Emperor of China. A cab was sent for: my portmanteau was put outside; and, to make all safe, the landlady embraced me at the door on getting in; whilst the bailiff, crossing the street, stepped into the hall, and waited patiently there until I was gone, doubtless thinking that his

victim was up stairs, and that all difficulties were now over. Mine were nearly, not quite. I covered up my face, but excited some attention in the ladies' waiting-room by the manner in which I warmed myself;—fact is, I quite forgot myself—to say nothing of the horse-ticket which I was obliged to ask for. My new purchase was already at the station. I became suddenly not only a woman, but a wife. I spoke of the horse as belonging to my husband, who was to join me. Of course, he didn't come; and I got into the unprotected females' compartment. I found an old woman and a young one, a nurse, with a baby, and two children, who ran up and down, from window to window, and played at cricket in the carriage. 'Tickets, tickets!' shouted the collector, as he ran along the line; for the life of me, I couldn't find my pocket-holes. Underneath I had on a pair of woollen-cord breeches; and my purse, tickets, and all, were in the pocket safe enough: how the deuce to get at them was the thing. 'Any gentleman of the name of Stuart,' shouted another, 'with a horse-box on? Anyone know anything about a horse-box, name of Stuart?' 'Now, or never,' said I to myself; 'I can't afford to lose the horse.' So I pulled up my dress, and pulled out my purse. I was just in time. 'All right, mum,' said the man, as he ran along; whilst the lady who sat opposite, after a moment's reflection, put her head quickly out of the window, and inquired for a policeman or the guard. 'Porter, porter!' said she, emboldened by the horrors of being locked up with a maniac or a murderer. But it was too late; a sharp, shrill whistle, and away we shot."

"By Jove, you must have been in a considerable fix! Help yourself to that claret, and pass it to Captain Gladwish. You were safe to be done at the first stoppage. What did you do?"

"By gad, sir, I told her the truth to a certain extent! I threw myself on her mercy. She was a good-looking woman; and I patted the heads of those cursed little children, who were making mince-meat of my corns every moment. Not exactly the truth, you know, but nearly. I knew she cared nothing about steeplechasing, nor bailiffs and sheriff's officers; so I made up a little history of a runaway match, and a lovely girl waiting for me and my quadruped down the line. She saw I was a gentleman, or thought so, at all events; and when I took leave of her, in the dark, she ended by——"

"Kissing you?"

"No, but by making the children do so. I'm not good at parting; but I gave them half a crown a piece for good luck.—No—no more claret, thank you, Cracks. Ought not we to go to the ladies?"

"Your late occupation has improved your manners. Who's

for a glass of sherry?" Here, Bingham, help Cropperton. I know he likes one; and it will do him good for to-morrow."

With that they left the room.

The morning was fine; and at an early hour the arrivals bespoke a goodly sprinkling of company. Hundreds of foot-passengers of all sorts, accompanied by bright-looking women, such as England's peasantry alone can produce, came early to get a good position. They made straight for the brook, or the biggest double they could find in the line of running; while the better class made their way to the temporary stands. Why are these stands usually erected where the least or worst part of the race is to be seen? Here they were joined by part of the London division—pickpockets, touts, tipsters, and prophets, low betting men, and welshers, for whom the proximity to the brook proved convenient later in the day. About twelve came dog-carts, and many humbler sorts of vehicles, the staple occupants of which were already accommodated with long pipes and a superfluity of beer. These were followed by heavy waggons, flies, and carriages, on which well-stocked hampers were apparent; and, half an hour previous to the proposed start, came well-appointed phaëtons, two or three drags, and a perfect cloud of horsemen, from the high sheriff of the county, and the masters of half a dozen packs of hounds, down to the well-to-do yeomen and hard-riding farmers of the adjacent counties.

At the château everything had gone on admirably. Mrs. Crackenthorpe proved an invaluable hostess, cheerful and entertaining, and doing all she could for her son's guests. She highly approved of Stuart, who paid her every attention—a thing she was wont to exact, as having once been her due. She was not half so much pleased with the noisy young Guardsman and his friends from London, who saw in her nothing but somebody's mother, a woman of five-and-forty, who could not be made love to, or conveniently ignored. Ned Bingham charmed her by his gravity, and Lord Cropperton by his *bonhomie*. When she started for the course, in a very neat bonnet of her son's colours, she looked remarkably well—for her years.

The breakfast was no sooner over than it became necessary for the riders to start for the course, to walk over it, and see that the stewards had put nothing impracticable in their way. Crackenthorpe led, accompanied by Munster, Stuart, his own jockey Bingham, Lord Cropperton, Captain Forrester, the young Guardsman, and twenty hangers-on, some riders and some owners. In the wake of this interesting body came a donkey-cart. On the top of the donkey-cart sat a grave-looking individual in a paper cap and a flannel jacket; a small boy drove the cart; and inside of it, and sticking out far beyond it fore and aft, were some



exceedingly strong new posts and rails. A hammer and rule were in his hand, and his pocket was full of tenpenny nails.

Of course they passed over the first three or four fences without any objection. There was nobody there who was afraid to ride. At last they came to the ox-fence on the side of the hill—a good post and rails, a straggling fence, and a very broad ditch, which had the advantage of not being seen till you got close to it.

“Well, I don’t call that such a big fence after all,” said the Guardsman; “go pretty fast at it.”

“I should think not,” said the Doctor, “now they’ve broken the top rail. Here, Stubbs, bring up the donkey-cart.”

“Oh, hang it! ’pon my soul!”

But Scalpel and Tom (who was not going to ride) were inexorable, and a top rail about the size of a man’s thigh was put in.

The brook excited some discussion; but as it was declared impossible to make it smaller, and it was perfectly symmetrical, the wiser thought it best to be silent, for fear of an improvement in the width by cutting it.

“At any rate, you can go in and out.”

This was a great consolation: the going in being pretty certain, the going out problematical.

“Anybody object to this fence?” said Cracks and a brother-steward, coming down to the double post and rails, which had a watercourse and a lot of blackthorn in between, and certainly required some negotiation.

“Yes, I do!” “And I!” “And I!” said a half dozen voices at once.

“So do I,” said the hard-riding Sawbones; “I object very strongly. There’s been some unfair play here.”

“You object, Scalpel! Why, dash it, old fellow! this is the favourite bit which you liked so much. What the deuce do you object to?”

“Some fellow’s been sawing away the second rail: just look where it’s cut through. Here, bring the cart.”

“No, no! let’s take our choice,” said Bingham. “The Doctor can go where he likes. There’s one big enough where he’s standing, to upset a coach.”

“And Bingham’s advice was followed. Altogether it was pronounced to be a stiffish course, but not too much for a good horse; quite impracticable, thank goodness! for a Newmarket weed, and a boy on his back, but just the thing for a hunter, and totally different from the Leamington and Liverpool pattern—more like Market Harborough.

When the hour drew near for starting, the horses appeared on

the course, closely clothed and hooded, as preserving that mystery to the last which attaches to all racing. Lord Cropperton's determined, big, brown horse was known by the coronet on the clothing; Crackenthorpe's by its colour, a raking grey, which had replaced Blue Peter. The rest were not at first detected, save only Stuart's nomination, who disposed of the boy who rode him up in so masterly a manner, that Billy Drinkwater, who happened to see it, shouted, "If there ain't old Hacheron again, I'm blest!" When his master cantered him before the stand, preparatory to starting, his late proprietors began to think they might have asked too little for him; whilst such were Stuart's misgivings, that he was almost doubtful whether the thirty guineas he had given at Tattersall's, without recognising him, were not rather too much.

"Bob, here's our old acquaintance. Where did you get Acheron, Stuart?"

"Acheron? That's the Devil among the Tailors. I bought him of some cavalry man who couldn't sit on him, at Tattersall's."

"He looks well. Have you backed him?"

"Yes, for a trifle—one hundred sovereigns to ten, four times over."

"I'll lay it you, if you like," said Cracks, in a good-natured tone of voice.

"Done!" said the Captain, pulling out his book in a phlegmatic way. "They're off."

I am not going to describe a steeplechase, even had I the pen of Homer or Whyte Melville. The judicious selection of ground had secured a few most unmistakable croppers, as, indeed, should be the case; but then the fences were of such a character that all the horses jumped at them, and there were none of those ugly cases for the coroner which arise from a slipshod way of galloping through. There's nothing so dangerous as a too easy course and a daisy-cutter. Over the big double, the first time round, two or three came to grief, the Doctor especially choosing a good stiff place, which did not give an inch, but turned him over. He did not, however, consider himself out of the race until his horse and he, landing in the water (if that's not a bull), began swimming rapidly down the stream, and eventually got out on the wrong side of a flag. Two strenuously refused the big bullfinch near the beginning of the course: but Ned Bingham came down at it by over-jumping, but recovered himself and his lost ground before the third mile. The horses going best were Lord Cropperton's brown horse, Gipsy, and Stuart upon the Devil among the Tailors, who, having taken the bit between his teeth, led throughout; and it was not till the third mile that his rider got a pull at him. When he did, his enemies and followers predicted his failure. "Of

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course, he must come back." But there could be no doubt that, with a good man on him, Acheron was not to be sneezed at; and Stuart, if he knew nothing else, knew how to ride. Half a mile from home, there were but three in the race—Cropperton, Bingham, and Acheron. "He can't win," said those who had laid against him. "By Jove, he will!" said the less partial judges of steeplechasing: "he's pulling double now!" Two fences from home the big brown horse made an effort, and soon found nothing but an accident could favour him. Bingham reserved his rush, on the grey, to the last fence, some bushed hurdles, at which they both went best pace. There was a minute's doubt on the part of the multitude. "The grey wins!" "No, he don't!" "Yes!" "No!" "By Jove, he does!" for the Devil went so fast that, on landing, he nearly fell, and Bingham galloped in, a winner by about a length; the Devil, late Acheron, a good second; and Lord Cropperton's brown horse third. There was some late arrivals, which need not be mentioned; and last of all, the Doctor, who was, as he said, not inclined to lose his ride, though his chance of winning was out. He looked extremely wet, but no ways disconcerted.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE RUN IN.

TOM CRACKENTHORPE's success was hailed with some clamour by the many. He was popular in the neighbourhood: spent his money like a gentleman, kept a good house, and was "hail-fellow-well-met" with his neighbours of every degree. Of course there were a few, who knew nothing about him, who said that he had made the steeplechase for himself, who did not know that his horse was almost a stranger to the course, having been bought out of a dealer's stable not many weeks before, and that he owed his triumph to the fact of having paid liberally and exercised considerable judgment in his selection. But his calumniators were found to be losers on the race, having backed Stuart's horse from his information — not altogether unprejudiced, in their opinion. The result was highly satisfactory at Lushenham.

The widow was in great force, but had adopted a new line altogether. This was the result of a conversation which took place at the cottage a few days before the steeplechase.

"Well! my dear," said Mrs. Bransby, sipping a glass of warm brandy and water, and spreading out her handkerchief over her knees to save her dress from fire or water; "how do you mean to manage now the hunting is all over? Those horses and the boy must go back; pretty penny that'll be, I know."

"They're gone back; and I suppose the expense is my business, mother, and not yours."

Mrs. Greystoke was evidently not on her company manners.

"Hoity toity! bless my heart, Kitty! I suppose it arn't treason to make a remark?" and the old lady swallowed several spoonfuls.

"That depends entirely upon the sort of remark, mother."

"It don't strike me that the business gets on quite so fast as it ought to; and, as I took the cottage and holds myself responsible——"

"The business gets on quite fast enough to please me, and is pretty nearly over; so don't you fidget about your responsibilities."

"Why, Kitty, my own dear girl," and the glowing enthusiasm of Mrs. Bransby shone in every feature, "do you mean to say——"

"Yes, I do mean to say—that if you'll only let me manage my own affairs I shall be much obliged to you."

"To be sure, Kitty. Well, now, who'd a thought it? So he has really come up to the mark at last; and it's all right? Give you joy, my dear; and so you've sent the 'unting 'orses away. I knew it was a good plan though. They all like you ridin' women, they do. It wasn't so in my day; it was the quiet sow as sucked the broth. But what have you got to go about in? Surely you mean to go to the steeplechase?"

"Of course I do; I've sent for a neat brougham and servant from Pumpington, and I shall go as the quiet sow. I think it will suit his mamma better; and she looks very sharp after him, I can tell you. One can get about in a brougham well enough in the summer."

"So can two, my dear; and I find it uncommon lonesome here sometimes. Don't you think you'd better ring the bell, Kitty, and have these things taken away?" Mrs. Bransby finished her tumbler; "he often comes in about this time after dinner."

"He won't come in to-night, so you needn't be in a hurry."

"Why not?" said the old lady.

"Because his mother won't let him," said the young one.

"Well! I shall go to bed, at all events, my dear," rejoined

Mrs. Bransby, rising and setting her wig straight. "Don't you forget now, Kitty, mind! quiet 's the thing while the old woman's here; colour don't look well in a brougham."

The consequence was that a dark-green brougham, with a good-looking horse and servant, conveyed the widow Greystoke to the most convenient corner of the course for seeing without being seen. She was dressed in the most becoming possible manner consonant with thorough respectability, which occasionally, in happy contrast to mysterious levity, delights to make itself hideous with affected plainness of apparel. She wore a handsome dress of French grey silk trimmed with black lace, a white tulle bonnet, a black lace mantilla or shawl, gloves faultless in shape, and contrasting with the felicitous hue of the bonnet's trimmings, and one handsome but exceedingly classic bracelet, of Rome Roman, giving effect to the rich sobriety of the rest of her costume. With her she carried her dear young friend Josephine Partington, the discreetest of confidantes, and the least attractive of rivals in the world.

Strange to say, she did not subdue Mrs. Crackenthorpe. That lady was strong in prejudice, and when she saw the woman whom she suspected of rivalling her in the affections of her son so apparently irreproachable and capable of doing it, she disliked and suspected her more than ever.

To tell the truth, the widow Greystoke was a successful contrast to the widow Crackenthorpe. The latter lady was a dresser too; but bright in colour, rich in texture, effective in *tout-ensemble*, behind the other in talent; and when she looked at the widow, the real Simon Pure—bonnet, robe, shawl, and ornament—she was compelled to admit that she was not much surprised at Tom's infatuation. Had she been asked for a reason she never could have given it; but she would have asseverated, none the less, "Mrs. Greystoke is not the woman for my son."

Tom Crackenthorpe seemed to have no interests beyond the brougham. Certain misgivings held possession of him as to the prudence of such a marriage, and his intended mother-in-law would have sufficed to have shaken the stern resolution. But Tom, it must be confessed, had taken a longer slide on the slippery surface of love-making than he intended, and one of two things was likely to happen—either an unmistakable fall, causing considerable grief to the adventurer, or a fatal plunge right in, to his eternal weal or woe. Mrs. Crackenthorpe had no idea of the extent of the mischief done, and for her peace of mind it was as well that it was so.

The example of Robert Munster had also an evil effect upon him. Love-making is very catching: and although it is but just

to say that Munster gave no great cause to the enemies of the tender passion to blaspheme, still, to see one's intimate friend and colleague admitted to all the privileges of incipient matrimony, standing, indeed, on the threshold of the sacred temple, and looking within, though not yet participating in the mysteries of that social institution, it was all Tom could do to refrain from proclaiming his own happiness at the expense of a nine-days' wonder. However, notwithstanding the widow's innuendoes, Tom had escaped that last extremity of bachelorhood as yet.

We have seen what took place at one of the cottages in Lushenham three days before the race: let us inspect the château three days after. All the men were gone, of course; there was nothing more to be got out of Lushenham that season, some had to arrange for their London season, and others to get money for the following Monday at the Corner; so Tom and his mother had the Box to themselves, with one exception—Stuart was still there. He was evidently not quite in his usual spirits since the race; and, being reduced to a becoming melancholy by his inability to meet his new liabilities, he was proportionably agreeable to Mrs. Crackenthorpe. Tom was not fond of blue devils in any one, and, having discussed the matter of Acheron, and expressed his surprise at his running so well, he did not trouble himself about the matter. Excepting that he had voluntarily lent Stuart a couple of hundreds to settle, he had not much to do with the results but to receive the money. But what woman ever saw a man "down on his luck" without wishing to give him a helping hand? Certainly not the mother of Tom Crackenthorpe: so from the moment she knew he had been in difficulties, and the steeplechase was likely to add to them, she took the *soi-disant* Captain under her especial protection.

Dinner was over on Saturday night, and Tom Crackenthorpe had disappeared—as he said, for one hour *on business*, which was no compliment to Mrs. Greystoke. The widow Crackenthorpe was seated before the fire on a low, luxurious *prie-dieu*, with nothing whatever in her hand (no woman ever so much hated work). Stuart sat opposite in an easy-chair, indulging in an occasionally disjointed remark, like a half-dumb piano out of tune, and wondering, meanwhile, whether it would be better to go to Tattersall's and pay, or whether he should temporize with his creditors and realize, when the lady looked up from a curiously shaped coal in the fireplace, and said—

"Mr. Stuart, how long have you known Tom?—I mean my son."

"Not very long; only since last autumn; but long enough to like him."

"So I perceive. Do you know this neighbourhood?"

"Not in the least. I have been here once or twice before in my life."

"Then you can be of no earthly service to me." And the lady sighed.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Mrs. Crackenthorpe; I should have been happy to have repaid some of the great obligations I owe your son." For once Stuart felt as he spoke; the 200*l.* cheque was beating against his waistcoat pocket.

"Will you ring the bell? and we'll have a cup of tea. As Tom is not come in yet, it is not necessary to wait." The tea came, the fire got brighter, and the lady more wakeful as the evening advanced.

"You've been out hunting here this season, Mr. Stuart?"

"I have, several times," said the gentleman.

"There's a lady who rides here, I believe, with the hounds?"

"There are several: Lady Mary Bashful, Miss Wilford, Mrs. Toppington, and——"

"I mean a lady from Lushenham," cut short the widow Crackenthorpe.

"Certainly, Mrs. Crackenthorpe: there's the parson's daughter, whom Munster is going to marry; nothing very extraordinary——"

"I mean a very pretty woman—a widow."

"Beauty, after all, is a matter of taste; I certainly don't admire Matilda Partington myself; but, of course, Munster's ideas of beauty——"

"Do you know a woman whose name is Greystoke, and who lives in the little white cottage near the Parsonage?" *Woman* was strongly accentuated.

"Greystoke? Greystoke?" said Stuart, as if a little uncertain. "Oh! yes, undoubtedly, Mrs. Crackenthorpe; but, really, there are so many women out hunting now-a-days that——"

"Just so, Mr. Stuart; but that it is, between ourselves, which makes me—which—in fact—you understand—but I shouldn't like it to go any further, and I'm sure I may trust you."

Stuart said she might; and if that was all she had to communicate, the lady might have saved herself the trouble of looking for a confidant. After another pause, during which Mrs. Crackenthorpe looked at her handkerchief, and played with the lace and the monogram, and Stuart looked at his boots and his watch, the attack was recommenced.

"I can't help thinking that Tom is very fond of you, Mr. Stuart; he often speaks of you and Mr. Bingham as his greatest favourites."

"I have the most substantial reasons for believing it at this moment."

"Ah! you men, too, have so much influence over one another on certain subjects—you understand me?—on certain subjects—so much more than even his own family. Now there is a—a—what shall I call it?—a sort of entanglement into which, I'm sure, Tom is falling, and—and—if—that Mrs. Greystoke—oh! Mr. Stuart, I can't bear to think of it, and yet I can't make him understand my views of it at all—not at all. I cannot think it would be for his happiness—he can't know anything about her. Now you, you know—you can't think what an effect ridicule has upon Tom; and if you feel under any obligation to him, it would be such a thing to prevent him making a fool of himself. Now, do, *do* say a word or two!"

"I can't flatter myself that I can have much influence over——"

"Try—do try, Mr. Stuart; and if you only knew what I should feel; the eternal obligation——"

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Crackenthorpe. I don't think I shall succeed with your son, but suppose I try the lady?"

"Ah! Mr. Stuart," said she, laughing, "I don't want you to run your head into the lion's mouth for——"

"For Tom! I've been in the lion's mouth before, and if you'll keep my counsel, Mrs. Crackenthorpe, I think I can make a clear field of this in a few days."

Tom's step was heard outside the door, and the conspirators stopped.

On Monday, Stuart went up to Tattersall's, and made good use of his money or his credit; and, as he carried back his masquerade costume in his portmanteau, it is to be presumed that he was enabled to stop the mouths of his creditors for a time.

Tom Crackenthorpe was sufficiently perplexed by the requirements of his mother, and the demands on his time made by Mrs. Greystoke. As affairs drew to a crisis that lady became a little *exigente*, and the embryo Squire had something to do to keep the two ladies apart, and to satisfy all inquiries on either side. He led but a sorry life of it between love and duty, which, unfortunately, are sometimes inconsistent with one another. What with lying to both parties—which he did, I regret to say; what with dodging in and out of both houses, for the widow could no longer take a ride; and what with the restless nights he endured, always the portion of the undecided, he looked as miserable as it was possible for one of the most jovial young bachelors upon earth. Robert Munster was in town, assisting in his preparations for the most important event in a man's life, and in satisfying his friends and the money-lenders that he was on the high way to meeting his bills by a prosperous marriage; and, as most



of them had discovered that Miss Matilda Partington certainly was an heiress, if there was any truth in Doctors' Commons, they were not loth to advance at something under thirty per cent. Old Munster added to the general hilarity by a grumpy but tacit consent, and took himself off to Ireland, after writing a congratulatory letter to the bride elect, ending with an Irish howl of glorious anticipation that Robert would prove as charming as a husband as he had been dutiful as a son.

There was joy in the halls of Lushenham, therefore, when at the end of another fortnight, Stuart reappeared. What with billiards and steeplechasing conversation, an occasional cigar, and some excellent '47 claret, Tom's soul became less restless, and Mrs. Crackenthorpe seemed to place every reliance in her guest's promises. They were fulfilled in a rather unexpected manner.

Sunday morning rose bright and cheerful on the 14th of April, 18—. Tom Crackenthorpe made a point of going to church; Stuart did not. Without wishing to analyse motives, we cannot withhold our praise from the former of these two gentlemen, who always set an example of propriety to the young men of his acquaintance by all outward observances. Partington spat and sputtered as usual; the music was just as charming as ever, excepting that the bass got a bar and a half a-head of the trebles; Lord Cropperton yawned at the end of the customary twenty minutes; and the school children had adopted their spring coughs with their summer bonnets. Tom stole a look or two at the widow, then at his mother; the two ladies were as religiously disposed as a couple of recluses, and looked at nothing but the bonnets of the Vicar's wife and daughters. The longest service must have an end, and the congregation at last found itself in the churchyard. The usual compliments of the day were passed; and, as Tom was about to retire, the widow returned his salute with a rather resolute blush, and an *empressment* more than ordinary. As she held out her hand, and showed a set of teeth which did her early dentist great credit, she said, with a smile which belied a sigh, or a sigh which belied a smile, "Mr. Crackenthorpe, I come to say good-bye: we leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said Tom, employing all the breath that remained to him.

"Yes, to-morrow: the season is over, and I think—I think my health is pretty well re-established. I shall have no better opportunity of saying adieu." And with a sweeping courtesy, which comprehended the Squire and his mother, the Vicar, his wife, daughters, and congregation in general, and a gentle sigh which went home to Tom alone, Mrs. Greystoke took her leave.

That Sunday afternoon Tom spent in company with an enor-

mous regalia; Mrs. Crackenthorpe, in comfortable security of mind, in the Lushenham Hall pew. Stuart was not at home; he had walked out over the late steeplechase ground, and, lighting a cigar, he sat quietly down on a hog-backed stile, and turned over in his mind a few disjointed thoughts. "Well, it's done: that's a comfort. I suppose this is the first honest action I've done for some years. Let's see how it pays. The marriage, if successful, I presume they'd have come down handsomely at first. In six months he would have paid more handsomely to have got his release. Wonderful game in my hands, to be sure! For what have I sacrificed it? To save a capital fellow from a very awkward predicament. What prompted me? Gratitude, gratitude! 'pon my soul—nothing else. I can hardly believe it. I wonder what he'd come down with if he knew it all? Not much, for a week or two. Very cheap to his mother at a thousand. However, he's a deuced good fellow, is Cracks. And, considering I've cut my own throat, I don't feel so bad, after all. Gad! I believe I'm a very honest fellow!" And with this sentiment he finished his cigar, and turned once more towards the château.

If appetite has anything to do with conscience, Stuart's must have been singularly clear. If Tom was buried in the depths of despair, his friend was in the seventh heaven. Tom was *distrain*, and began already to discover that Lushenham was confoundedly stupid. Stuart spoke of his own misfortunes and necessities with considerable *aplomb*, and appeared to have begun a new life, full of hopeful anticipations. Mrs. Crackenthorpe and he carried on an uninterrupted and very animated conversation on dozens of subjects, and had it all to themselves. At length the lady retired, and Tom set to work at the claret in right earnest. Men can't go on drinking and smoking and staring at each other in that way without conversation; so at last they began—first about the late season, then about the next, then about the studs for sale, then about Acheron, thence they got to riding, then to women, and by a not difficult transition to the widow.

"Ah! she's gone—going, that is, to-morrow."

"Gone? Impossible!"

"Going to-morrow—so she said, coming out of church," replied Tom, with a slight choking, which might have been the claret.

"Curious woman; couldn't make her out," said Stuart, apologetically.

"I don't think you ever liked her?"

"Not much, certainly. Do you recollect a bet we had some time ago?"

"Certainly—one hundred," said Tom; "you'd have lost."

"How do you know? Do you mean to say, Crackenthorpe, you really thought of marrying Mrs. Greystoke?"

Tom looked profoundly sheepish, took his regalia out of his mouth, turned it round, put it back again, and replied in a low tone, "I might have done so."

"You couldn't," said Stuart, shooting out his head, and fixing his eyes steadily upon his companion.

"And why not?"

"Because she's married already."

If the earth had opened, and the claret-jug and its contents had suddenly disappeared, Tom could not have looked more disconcerted.

"Oh, nonsense!" and he turned round and threw his legs up on the sofa on which he was sitting, and sent out a whiff of tobacco which bespoke unutterable contempt. "Whom to?"

"Suppose I say it's to me?"

Tom elevated his eyebrows, and was perfectly awful to look at as a grand example of disbelief.

"Will you listen to me while you smoke your cigar?" said Stuart.

"Of course I will, if you wish it."

Tom rang the bell and returned to his recumbent position.

"Bring another bottle of claret, make the fire up, and tell Mrs. Crackenthorpe not to wait tea for us; we'll have a cup of coffee in here."

Had I the pen of a Fielding, a Le Sage, or a Defoe, I should have thought it my duty to have headed a chapter, thus late in my sketch, with "The Story of Captain Stuart." Not having the lively imagination of those writers, who interwove story within story, and—very types of a steam-engine—worked wheels within wheels, I shall make our adventurer give the salient angles of a life remarkable for nothing but its systematic deviations from rectitude and prudence, and its final inconsistency in an act of honesty to serve no purpose but an impulse of gratitude. An analysis of the human mind will show that the two are not compatible the one with the other. Let him tell his tale in his own way.

"You know, old fellow, you've been deuced kind to me. You got me out of a mess, the week before last, that money won't repay." Cracks thought it wouldn't either; but he didn't say so. "The long and the short of it is, I owe you a good deal"—one way or the other he did—"and I don't see how I could do otherwise than tell you the truth." Tom waited to see how much that was worth, to knock off the balance. "Well, then, my father was a clergyman, one of your pluralists, as you call 'em. He'd a living in Essex, and another in Sussex—both of them pretty good—and a small estate in Wales. In fact, he was tolerably well off, and as long as we lived at home it was all very jolly. We had lots of horses and company, and did pretty much as

we liked; and the old gentleman never grumbled. But there was one thing he hated—he hated to pay a good stiff sum out of his income for anything that didn't show—didn't seem to tell, you know, such as education. My eldest brother went to Cambridge, and he spent a lot o' money; and Dick, he took to the law—and that cost a heavy sum, I suppose, for the premium, or whatever it is; and Charles, he went into the army, and this sickened the governor; and, when it came to me, he would keep me at home. I'm hanged if I know where I learned to read or write—my sisters or the governess must have taught me. As to school, I believe I went once, but I ran away; at all events, it was only by snatches, and the old gentleman used to growl so when the bills had to be paid. Of course I liked being at home—and I used to hunt and shoot, and amuse myself; and I think he liked to have somebody to go out with the girls—it saved him trouble. I was always with the officers at Fort Muster; and, what with blind-hokey, and hurdle-racing, and duck-hunting on Sunday, and the garrison hounds, I wasn't good for much at eighteen."

"Very few people are," said Tom, parenthetically; "I wasn't myself."

"The worst of it was, too," continued Stuart, "that the governor never made me any allowance, so that I never knew the use or value of money, any more than the proper way to get it. If I wanted a horse, I got it; and if nobody could or would lend me money—neither the officers nor my sisters (who were like all other sisters, and spoilt me because I was the worst of the lot)—I used to give a bill at three or six months—an easy method, you know, of paying double for everything. Originally I don't think I meant to be dishonest; but I had imbibed a sort of idea that it was right to have money, *i. e.* pocket-money, but that all bills took care of themselves. They only seemed to want renewing to make all smooth; and I had at one time invented a mental arithmetic, by which a man could live, and everybody else indeed, for ever, at so much every three months, according to the size of the original investment in stamped paper. I find that it does not answer for individuals, though I am told it has been extensively employed in the United States of America. When I was twenty-one years old my father died. We ceased to have a home; his fortune was divided, and he had not insured his life for a penny: in one year's time I had entirely dissipated the few hundreds that came to my share; and perhaps my greatest regret has been that I was fool enough to spend half in satisfying my creditors, from whom I ought to have run away. I was arrested a dozen times; and, as it was not unfrequently at the house of a brother or a sister, who meant to be kind to me, I soon disgusted every mem-

ber of my family. I lived partly on the turf, partly on my late friends who had not found me out, and partly by a promiscuous sort of gambling. I have been a private in a cavalry regiment, officiated as an English tutor and chaplain at a German spa, and driven a Hansom cab, without detection; and I can safely affirm that the last occupation was by far the honestest and least vicious of the whole. As there is a theory extant that no man can be utterly done until he is married——”

“Of course not,” said Tom; “if going down hill, the double weight quickens your efforts; if rising, it impedes them. But go on, as I don’t see how that affects your case: help yourself, and give us the claret.”

“You’ll see whether it affects my case. Admitting the truth of this theory, I proceeded to put the climax to my absurdities. I was in luck at the time; had won some money at a hell; had changed my name, and had become rather a fast man about town. I was one night behind the scenes at a low theatre on the other side of the water. I was attracted by a remarkably pretty face, good manners, a fine figure, and an air of respectability, aided by an obese mamma, who guarded her darling from the chilling effects of the night air and the warm importunities of the Surrey *roués*. I was admitted as a privileged visitor. They speculated upon my ready money, I on the prospect of happiness and a home by my wife’s exertions. We were a nice couple, and, having deceived one another thoroughly, and achieved a notoriety which boded no good to us mutually, we agreed to separate. We have not met for about eight years: whether she continues, during the summer months, to dance on the tight rope as formerly, to lead the village choir in ‘Masaniello,’ or to captivate all hearts on market-day on the fiery steed *Demonologos* at Mr. Cooke’s Circus in the provinces, I can’t tell: she rides the high horse in the winter, at all events. I was lucky. An aunt, who was ignorant of the extent of my vagabondism, but knew enough of it to control her generosity, left me a bare sufficiency, to be paid by monthly instalments, upon condition that I took my mother’s name. I have since complied strictly with the injunction.”

“And who in the world was your wife, and what has become of her?” said Crackenthorpe, suddenly sitting upright on the sofa.

“We called ourselves Fisher, which was the name of my father and family; and for one week I called her Kitty.”

“And you’ve never seen her since?”

“I’ve never seen Kitty Fisher since, but I’ve been introduced to a lady who closely resembles her.”

“And where is she?” said Tom, getting quite anxious.

“She’s going to London to-morrow morning, and she calls herself Mrs. Greystoke.”

Tom Crackenthorpe rose, took a tumbler, emptied about one-third of a bottle of claret in it, and drank it solemnly off. He then took Stuart's hand, and said—"Now I understand all about it; better late than never. So that woman meant to marry me?"

"Undoubtedly; and she generally does what she means."

"And you recognised her at first?"

"Immediately."

"Why not have mentioned it before?"

"Could I have guessed she was likely to have fixed her talons in you as she did in me? She stung me hard enough to have left her sting behind. No, no, Crackenthorpe. I haven't been educated to have any principles; never cultivated them; but gratitude grows wild, I suppose, in some soils; so I started her; told her it wouldn't do. You know between ourselves, I had a bit of a struggle, and I felt once or twice like a d—d rascal. I suppose you never knew what it was to be a beggar, or a cabman, or a horse soldier, or a prisoner in Whitecross Street?"

"Never," said Tom; "but I can feel for you, Stuart. You've done me service, though it's a little hard to take the physic at first; so finish the bottle, and let's go to bed."

A few weeks afterwards the two went abroad together; since which time Stuart's affairs have righted themselves by slow degrees; and he congratulates himself upon having narrowly escaped being the greatest scoundrel unhung.

Now for Robert Munster.

The first of May came round, as such days must come. It was a gala day for the village of Lushenham. The county paper gave a most flourishing account of the bride and the bridegroom, the school-room and the flowers, the pathos of the spluttering divine who stammered over the service, the grandeur of the mother-in-law, and the loveliness of the bridesmaids. But it is mine, and mine only, to recount a terrible truth connected with these matrimonial quicksands, on which are wrecked the happiness of so many. There, on that fatal morning sat, encircled by her ordinary companions, the real Simon Pure, the original Matilda Partington, the actual heiress, the possessor of twenty thousand pounds, the *niece* of the Reverend the Vicar, and his ward, neatly preserved, and justly, for his own son, at that time serving in one of Green's merchant-ships. No one could see this young lady without admiration. She could have well dispensed with her attractive fortune; and when Bobby Munster first set eyes on her, even on his wedding morning, he could not help feeling that he might have waited and fared better. It was, I am glad to say, not till after the happy knot was tied that a formal introduction took place to "My cousin, Miss Matilda Partington, of Cold Shoulderingham,"

and it was not till the third day after that happy morning that the bridegroom had ascertained beyond all doubt that he or Doctors' Commons had made a slight mistake. Then arose in all its horrors the ghastly array of bills accepted, payable, which could not be paid; of the little house, and the wedding tour, and the dear, innocent, unsuspecting girl, who was for spending money as if her Bob's nightcap had been Fortunatus's wishing-cap; and, as these two ill-regulated minds clashed rather unmusically whenever expenses came on the *tapis*, Robert Munster decided upon falling back upon the fathers. The newly married couple were hurried into a cheap and dull town in Flanders; the bills were collected, taxed, and compounded for by the elders; and their habit and hard work have almost reconciled the pair to their lot. Bob practises his profession, and is thankful for a brief—when he can get it; he occasionally writes an article, and is paid for it, but not in "The Times" nor "The Quarterly." His wife is nursing her second baby. His work and her nursing have wrought a wonderful effect. Perhaps he's as well without the heiress, after all.

For a happy marriage, however, it was very like an Armstrong shell; for it disabled the couple itself, two fathers, a mother, several sisters, an indiscriminate phalanx of money-lending Jews, and a lady at Pumpington. Bob looks back to that season at Lushenham, with mixed feelings, at best.

The château has been let. Its owner returned from the Continent, and hunted through the winter with increased satisfaction that there were no more widows about the country. But he met with an enemy nearly as dangerous in the wire-fencing. It turned him over as effectually as Mrs. Greystoke herself; and if she broke his heart, she did nothing towards damaging his horse's knees.

Stuart became his right-hand man when he came into his well-nursed property, and manages to see a good deal of sport upon the agency of the Crackenthorpe estates. Mrs. Crackenthorpe thinks she never can be sufficiently grateful to the wily Captain, who now eschews bills and "lives cleanly."

Tom is about to be married to an old acquaintance—Emily Gladwish. His susceptible temperament could not get through the winter without something to fall in love with. The Pumpington belles were too far off to fan a flame which wanted constant feeding; and one day, when his mother had imprudently left him to make a visit of a fortnight, the irrevocable word popped out. The widow Crackenthorpe returned only in time to be apprised of everybody's consent but her own; and, although she would have preferred a lady of title, or of strikingly brilliant position, the sweet temper and winning ways, the bright and cheerful intellect

grace of Tom's dear Emily, reconciled her to a state of unclouded happiness for her son.

She dispenses Tom's boisterous hospitalities in another county, and the Box for a Season knows him no more. It is still the residence of a bachelor, who delights in the grand pasture lands of our favourite hunting country, and who has matured the ill-directed though honest endeavours of Tom Crackenthorpe for the development of steeplechasing to something like an efficient result. May his efforts be crowned with success; and may the nationality of that glorious sport find a honest parentage there, in lieu of an unjust and cruel stepmother, who has utterly crippled her bantling, elsewhere!

Another House reigns in the place of the Crackenthorpe dynasty, but the château at Lushenham continues to this day to be the pleasantest bachelor's box in the county.

THE END.





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